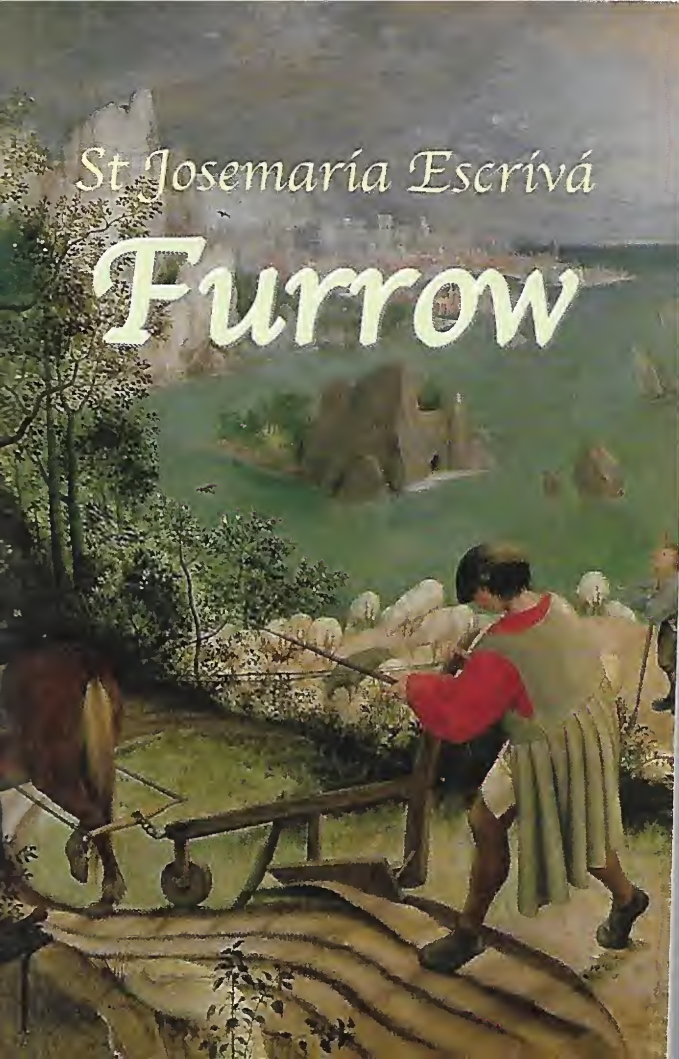


*St Josemaría Escrivá*

# Furrow



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# FURROW



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## THE AUTHOR

Saint Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer was born in Barbastro, in northern Spain, on 9 January 1902. He started his ecclesiastical studies in the Seminary of Logroño in 1918, and later, in 1920, in that of Saint Francis de Paula in Saragossa. Between 1923 and 1927 he studied Civil Law in the University of Saragossa. He was ordained to the priesthood on 28 March 1925. He began his work as a priest in the village of Perdiguera, within the diocese of Saragossa, and afterwards in Saragossa itself.

In the spring of 1927, he moved to the Spanish capital, Madrid, and there carried out abundant priestly work, devoting attention also to the poor and destitute in the outlying districts of the city, and especially

to the incurably sick and the dying in the hospitals. He worked as chaplain for the *Patronato de Enfermos* (Foundation for the Sick), a welfare organization run by the Apostolic Sisters of the Sacred Heart. He also taught at a university academy, and continued his studies for a doctorate in Civil Law.

On 2 October 1928, God let him see Opus Dei (in English, the Work of God). By divine inspiration, on 14 February 1930 he understood that the apostolic work of Opus Dei also needed to include women. As a result, a new path was opening up in the Church to foster, among people from all social classes, the effort to attain holiness and to carry out apostolate, through the sanctification of ordinary work, in the midst of the world. On 14 February 1943, he founded the Priestly Society of the Holy Cross, which is inseparably united to Opus Dei and which, as well as opening up the possibility of ordaining lay members of Opus Dei to the priesthood and incardinating them for the service of the Work, would later on also enable priests who are incardinated in dioceses to share in Opus

Dei's spirituality and asceticism, seeking holiness in the exercise of their ministerial duties, while remaining exclusively under their respective Ordinaries. Opus Dei was established as a Personal Prelature by Saint John Paul II on 28 November 1982. This was the canonical formula foreseen and desired by Saint Josemaría Escrivá.

In 1946 he took up residence in Rome, which was to be his home for the rest of his life. From there, he encouraged and guided the development of Opus Dei throughout the world, using all his energies to give to the men and women of Opus Dei a solid formation in doctrine, ascetical spirit and apostolate. At the time of his death, Opus Dei had more than 60,000 members from 80 different nationalities.

Saint Josemaría died on 26 June 1975. For years, he had been offering his life for the Church and for the Pope. His mortal remains rest beneath the altar of the prelatial church of Our Lady of Peace, in the central offices of the Prelature of Opus Dei. The reputation for holiness which the Founder of Opus Dei enjoyed in his lifetime has spread after his death to the far corners of the

earth, as can be seen from countless spiritual and material favours attributed to his intercession; among them, a number of cures which are medically inexplicable. Saint John Paul II canonized Josemaría Escrivá on 6 October 2002.

His published writings, apart from the theological and legal study *La Abadesa de la Huelgas*, include books of spirituality which have been translated into many different languages: *The Way*, *Holy Rosary*, *Christ is Passing By*, *Friends of God*, *The Way of the Cross*, *In Love with the Church*, *Furrow*, and *The Forge*. Another book published under his name is *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, which brings together interviews he gave to members of the press. A wide range of documentation on Saint Josemaría can be found at [www.escrivaworks.org](http://www.escrivaworks.org) and at [www.opusdei.org](http://www.opusdei.org).

## PREFACE

In 1950 the Servant of God Josemaría Escrivá had already promised to meet his readers again in a new book — *Furrow*. In the preface to the seventh Spanish edition of *The Way* he wrote, "I hope to let you have it in a few months' time".<sup>1</sup> What the Founder of Opus Dei wanted then has become a reality now, on the eleventh anniversary of his going to Heaven.

*Furrow* could really have been brought out many years ago. Monsignor Escrivá was on the point of sending it to the printers on several occasions, but as the old Castillian proverb says: "You can't ring the bells and walk in the procession at the same

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<sup>1</sup> *Camino*, 7th ed., Rialp, Madrid 1950

time." He was prevented from making that last revision of the manuscript with leisure by his intense foundational work, his attention to the task of governance at the head of Opus Dei, his wide pastoral work with so many souls and his many other duties in service of the Church. *Furrow* had been finished, however, for some time, including the titles for the chapters into which it was divided. All that needed doing was to arrange the various entries in numerical order and to make a final stylistic revision.

*The Way* is a book that has sold more than three million copies and has been translated into more than thirty languages. Like it, *Furrow* is the fruit of Monsignor Escrivá's interior life and experience with souls. It was written with the intention of encouraging personal prayer and making it easier. Because of its approach and style, then, it cannot be classified as a systematic theological treatise, though its rich and deep spirituality does contain profound theology.

*Furrow* is directed to the whole Christian person — body and soul, nature

and grace – and not only to the mind. That is why its source is not reflection alone, but Christian life itself. It reflects the waves of movement and rest, of spiritual energy and of peace, which the action of the Holy Spirit had impressed in the soul of the Servant of God and of those around him. *Spiritus, ubi vult, spirat*, the Spirit breathes where it wills,<sup>2</sup> and brings with it a depth and harmony of life which cannot be equalled, which cannot – and should not – be confined by the narrow limits of a merely man-made structure.

There lies the reason for the approach of this book. Monsignor Escrivá never wished – in any field, much less in the things of God – to make a suit of clothes first and then fit the child in by force. Out of respect for the freedom of God and the freedom of men, he preferred to be an attentive observer, to be able to recognise the gifts of God, to learn first and only then to teach. I heard him say so often, when he arrived in a new country, or when he got together with a new group of people, “I have come

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<sup>2</sup> John 3:8

here to learn"; and he did learn. He learned from God and from souls, and he transformed his capacity to learn into a constant process of teaching for those of us who were around him.

With the considerations he makes in this book, drawn from his wide experience of souls, the Founder of Opus Dei displays before us a series of qualities which should shine in the life of all Christians: generosity, daring, sincerity, naturalness, loyalty, friendship, purity, a sense of responsibility ... Just by reading the table of contents we can discover the full scope of human perfection – "the virtues of man" (Preface) – which Monsignor Escrivá discovers in Jesus Christ, "perfect God and perfect Man".<sup>3</sup>

Jesus is the complete model of the human ideal of a Christian, for "Christ the Redeemer fully reveals man to man himself".<sup>4</sup> Let the words of the author of *Furrow* serve as a summary of these virtues as he gives thanks to Our Lord for having decided to become "perfect Man, with a

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<sup>3</sup> Athanasian Creed

<sup>4</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical *Redemptor hominis*, March 1979, 10



Heart which loved and is most lovable; which loved unto death and suffered; which was filled with joy and sorrow; which delighted in the things of men and showed us the way to Heaven; which subjected itself heroically to duty and acted with mercy; which watched over the poor and the rich and cared for sinners and the just" (813).

What appears in these pages is Christian life itself, in which – at Christ's pace – the divine and the human are interwoven, not confused, and yet kept in perfect union. "But do not forget that these considerations of mine, though they may seem very human to you, must be priestly as well, since I have written them for you and for myself – and I have put them into practice too – before God" (Preface). They are the human virtues of a Christian, and precisely for that reason they appear fully developed; they delineate the character of the mature man or woman, who has the maturity that belongs to a child of God, who knows that his Father is close by: "We should make no mistake. God is no shadowy or distant being who created us then abandoned us; nor is he a master who goes away and does

not return.(...) God is here with us, really present, living. He sees and hears us, He guides us, and knows our smallest deeds, our most hidden intentions" (658).

Thus, Monsignor Escrivá presents the virtues in the light of man's divine destiny. The chapter "Beyond Death" gives the reader this perspective; it frees him from an exclusively human way of thinking and anchors him to another – an eternal way (cf. 879). The Christian human virtues are thereby placed far above the merely natural virtues: they are "the virtues of the children of God". Awareness of his divine filiation must permeate the whole life of a Christian, who finds in God the strength and the motive for striving to be better, even humanly better: "Once you were pessimistic, hesitant and apathetic. Now you are completely transformed: you feel courageous, optimistic and self-confident, because you have made up your mind, at last, to rely on God alone" (426).

Another example of how Christian human virtues have divine roots is found in suffering. Confronted by the sorrows of this world, Christian fortitude cannot be

confused with a stoic acceptance of adversity, for – with one's sights on Christ's Cross – it becomes the source of supernatural life, because "the great Christian revolution has been to convert pain into fruitful suffering and to turn a bad thing into something good" (887). Monsignor Escrivá knows how to discover God's action in suffering, both in this life – "Allow yourself to be cut, gratefully, because God has taken you in his hands as if you were a diamond" (235) – and after death: "Purgatory shows God's great mercy and washes away the defects of those who wish to become one with Him" (889).

The human virtues never appear as if they were an addition to a Christian existence. Together with the supernatural virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit, they form the framework of the daily life of the children of God. Grace penetrates nature to its roots, to heal it and divinize it. If, as a result of original sin, human nature cannot reach its fulness without grace, it is no less true that grace should not be thought of as juxtaposed to nature, acting on its margin. On the contrary, grace makes nature

achieve its greatest perfection so that it can then be made divine. Monsignor Escrivá cannot conceive how one could live in a divine manner without being very human, for this is the first victory of grace. That is why he gives such importance to the human virtues. For if they were absent they would lead to the failure of Christian life itself: "There are many Christians who follow Christ and are astonished by his divinity, but forget him as Man. And they fail in the practice of supernatural virtues despite all the external paraphernalia of piety, because they do nothing to acquire human virtues" (652). This deep human sense of the Christian life was always present in the preaching and writings of the Founder of Opus Dei. He did not like disembodied 'spiritualities', for he would say that the Lord has made us human beings, not angels, and we should behave as human beings.

Monsignor Escrivá's teaching brings together the human and the divine aspects of Christian perfection. That must be so when the Catholic doctrine on the Incarnate Word is known in depth and when it is

loved, and lived, passionately. The practical and vital consequences of that joyful reality are clearly drawn in *Furrow*. The author has sketched in outline the life and work of a Christian in the midst of the world, fully committed to the noble aspirations that move other men, and at the same time totally directed towards God. The resulting portrait is most attractive. A Christian has "a calm and balanced character" (417), and that is why he knows how to play the notes "used in ordinary life, the ones people normally hear" (440). He is endowed with "inflexible will, deep faith and an ardent piety" (417), and he places at the service of others the qualities he possesses (cf. 422). His universal mentality shows the following characteristics: "A breadth of vision and a deepening insight into the things that remain alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy; a proper and healthy desire, which should never be frivolous, to present anew the standard teachings of traditional thought in philosophy and the interpretation of history; a careful awareness of trends in science and contemporary thought; and a positive and

open attitude towards the current changes in society and in ways of living" (428).

In clear contrast with this portrait, Monsignor Escrivá also sketches the characteristic features of the frivolous man, lacking in true virtues, who is like a reed moved by the wind<sup>5</sup> of his own fancies or comfort. His typical excuse is: "I don't want to commit myself to anything" (539); and his existence takes place in the most desolate emptiness. Such frivolity, from a Christian point of view, can be given other names too: "calculation, tepidity, easy-goingness, lack of idealism and mediocrity" (541).

The prescription of a remedy follows the diagnosis of the illness. "Nothing perfects our personality so much as correspondence with grace" (443). He then proposes a very sound and practical piece of advice: "Try to imitate the Virgin Mary and you will be a complete man or woman" (443). Next to Jesus, a Christian always discovers his Mother, Holy Mary, and always goes to her for all his needs: to

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<sup>5</sup> cf Matt 11:7

imitate her, to get to know her, to avail himself of her powerful intercession. It is most significant that all the chapters of *Furrow* should end with some thought related to the Blessed Virgin. Every Christian effort to grow in virtue leads to identification with Jesus Christ, and there is no surer or more direct way for this than devotion to Our Lady. It is as if I can still hear the voice of the Servant of God, on one of the first occasions I met him, joyfully explaining to me that "one always goes and returns to Jesus through Mary".

Alvaro del Portillo  
Rome, 26 June 1986

## FOREWORD

*My reader and friend,  
let me help your soul  
contemplate the virtues of man,  
for grace works upon nature.  
But do not forget  
that these considerations of mine,  
though they may seem very human to you,  
must be priestly as well,  
since I have written them  
for you and for myself  
— and I have put them into practice too —  
before God.  
I ask Our Lord  
that these pages  
may be of use for us.  
May we profit by them  
and be moved by them  
so that in our lives  
our deeds may leave behind  
a deep and fertile furrow.*



## GENEROSITY

1      There are many Christians who are persuaded that the Redemption will be completed in all environments of the world, and that there have to be some souls – they do not know which ones – who will contribute to carrying it out with Christ. But they think it will take centuries, many centuries. It would be an eternity, if it were to take place at the rate of their self-giving.

That was the way you yourself thought, until someone came to “wake you up”.

2      Self-giving is the first step along the road of sacrifice, joy, love, union with God. –And so an entire life is filled with a holy madness which makes us find happiness where human logic would only see denial, suffering, pain.

3 "Pray", you said, "that I may be generous, that I may progress, and come to change in such a way that one day I may be useful in something."

Good. —But what means are you using so that these resolutions can be effective?

4 You often ask yourself why souls who have had the great fortune of knowing the true Jesus ever since their childhood, hesitate so much in responding with the best they have: their life, their family, their ideals.

Look: you are bound to show yourself very grateful to the Lord, precisely because you have received 'everything' in one go. Just as it would strike a blind man if he suddenly recovered his sight, while it does not even occur to others to give thanks because they see.

But that is not enough. You have to help those around you, daily, to behave with gratitude for their being sons of God. If you don't, don't tell me you are grateful.

5 Meditate on this slowly: I am asked for very little compared to how much I am being given.

6 As you never seem to manage to set off, consider what a brother of yours wrote to me: "It takes an effort, but once you have 'made up your mind', how you gasp with happiness when you find yourself firmly on your way!"

7 "These days", you were saying, "have been the happiest in my life." –And I answered you without hesitation: that is because you 'have lived' with a little more self-giving than usual.

8 The Lord's calling – vocation – always presents itself like this: "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me."

Yes: a vocation demands self-denial, sacrifice. But how pleasant that sacrifice turns out to be – *gaudium cum pace*, joy and peace – if that self-giving is complete!

9 When they talked to him about committing himself personally, his reaction was to reason in the following manner: "If I did, I could do that..., I would have to do this other..."

—The answer he got was: “Here, we don’t bargain with the Lord. The law of God, the invitation of the Lord, is something you either take or leave, just as it is. You need to make up your mind: go forward, fully decided and without holding back; otherwise, go away. *Qui non est mecum...* — whoever is not with Me, is against Me.”

10 Between lack of generosity and lukewarmness there is only one step.

11 I am copying this example of cowardice from a letter so that you will not imitate it: “I am certainly very grateful to you for keeping me in mind, because I need many prayers. But I would also be grateful if, when you ask Our Lord to make me an ‘apostle’, you would not insist on asking him to make me surrender my freedom.”

12 That acquaintance of yours, very intelligent, well off, a good man, used to say: “You have to do what the law says, but within limits, doing what is strictly necessary, without going too far.”

And he would add: "You shouldn't sin, of course, but there is no need to give up everything."

How sad it is to see men who are mean, calculating, incapable of making any sacrifice, of giving themselves wholeheartedly to a noble ideal.

13 More should be asked of you, because you can give more and you should give more. Think about it.

14 "It's very difficult", you exclaim, disheartened.

Listen, if you make an effort, with the grace of God that is enough. Put your own interests to one side, you will serve others for God, and you will come to the aid of the Church in the field where the battles are being fought today: in the street, in the factory, in the workshop, in the university, in the office, in your own surroundings, amongst your family and friends.

15 You wrote to me saying: "In the end, it's the same as ever, a great lack of generosity. What a pity, what a shame, to find

the way and then allow a few – inevitable – clouds of dust to obscure the goal!”

Don't be annoyed if I tell you that you are the only one to blame: struggle courageously against yourself. The means you have are more than enough.

16 If your selfishness leads you away from the ordinary desire for the holy and healthy well-being of mankind, if you count the cost or if you are not moved by the wretched material or moral condition of your neighbour, you force me to reproach you strongly, so that you can do something about it. If you do not feel a holy fraternity with your fellow men, and you live on the margin of the great Christian family, you are just a pitiful waif.

17 The summit? For a soul which has surrendered itself, everything becomes a summit to conquer. Every day it discovers new goals, because it does not know how, or want, to limit the love of God.

18 The more generous you are for God, the happier you will be.

19 We often feel tempted to reserve a bit of time for ourselves alone.

Learn once and for all to remedy such meanness, by putting things right immediately.

20 You were one of those “all or nothing” types. And as you could do nothing... what a misfortune!

Begin to fight humbly, to light up that poor self-giving of yours, which is so mean, until it becomes “all” effective.

21 Those of us who have dedicated ourselves to God, have lost nothing.

22 I would like to speak very loudly into the ear of so many men and women: giving up one's children to the service of God is not a sacrifice: it is an honour and a joy.

23 A time of hard trial arrived for him, and he came to you grief-stricken.

—Do you remember? For him — the friend who used to give you his “prudent” advice — your behaviour was only a utopia, the result of deformed ideas; manipulation

of wills, and... other "cleverness" of that type.

—"This self-giving to the Lord", he would assert, "is an abnormal excitement of the religious sentiment." And with his faulty reasoning, he thought that between your family and you a stranger had entered: Christ.

Now he has understood what you told him so often: Christ never separates souls.

24 Here is an urgent task: to stir up the consciences of believers and non-believers — to gather together men of good will — who are willing to help and to provide the material instruments which are needed for the work with souls.

25 He shows a great deal of enthusiasm and understanding. But when he realises that it refers to *him*, and that it is *he* who has to contribute in earnest, he slinks away like a coward.

It reminds me of those who, during moments of grave danger, used to shout with false courage: War! War! But they did not want to give any money or to enrol to defend their country.



26 It is sad to see what some people understand by almsgiving: a few pennies or some old clothes. They seem not to have read the Gospel.

Don't be over-cautious: help people to acquire sufficient faith and fortitude to be ready to deny themselves generously, in this life, what they need.

And to those who lag behind, explain that it is neither very noble nor very graceful, even from an earthly point of view, to wait for the last moment, when they will be obliged to take nothing with them.

27 "Whoever lends anything, never gets it back; if he does get it back, it will never be the full amount; and if so, it won't be exactly right; but if it is exactly right, he'll be an enemy for life."

Well then?... Give!, without counting the cost, and always for God. In this way you will live, even humanly speaking, closer to the rest of humanity, and you will make your contribution and the number of the ungrateful will be less.

28 I saw a blush on the face of that

simple man; he was almost in tears. He had contributed generously to good works, giving honest money which he himself had earned, and then he heard that "good people" had called his actions dishonest.

With the candidness of a beginner in these battles of God, he murmured: "They see that I make a sacrifice... and they still sacrifice me!"

—I talked to him slowly: he kissed my crucifix, and his natural indignation was changed into peace and joy.

29 Don't you have that mad desire to give yourself more completely, more *irrevocably*?

30 How ridiculous is the attitude of us poor little human beings when we deny the Lord such trifles again and again! As time goes by, and we begin to see things in their true perspective, then shame and sorrow are born.

31 *Aure audietis, et non intelligetis: et videntes videbitis, et non perspicietis.* These are the clear words of the Holy Spirit: they hear with their own ears, and

they do not understand; they see with their own eyes, but they do not perceive.

Why worry if some, although they *see* the apostolate and they know how great it is, still do not give themselves to it? Pray in peace, and persevere along your way. If they don't want to set out, there will be others!

32 Ever since you said *Yes*, time has broadened your horizons, giving them new and brighter colours and making them more beautiful every day. But you have to continue saying *Yes*.

33 The Blessed Virgin Mary, Teacher of unlimited self-giving. Do you remember? It was in praise of her that Jesus Christ said: "Whoever fulfils the Will of my Father, he – she – is my mother!..."

Ask of this good Mother that her answer, with the generosity it shows, may grow stronger in your soul – with the strength of love and liberation. *Ecce ancilla Domini* – behold the handmaid of the Lord.

## HUMAN RESPECT

34 When the defence of truth is at stake, how can we desire neither to displease God nor to clash with our surroundings? These two things are opposed: it is either the one or the other! The sacrifice has to be a holocaust where everything is burned up, even the thought: "what will they say?", even what we call our reputation.

35 How clearly I see now that "holy shamelessness" is rooted, very deeply, in the Gospel! Fulfil the Will of God..., remembering Jesus falsely accused, Jesus spat upon and buffeted, Jesus brought before the shabby courts of men... And Jesus silent!!

—A resolution: I shall bow my head when insulted, and — knowing that

humiliations will certainly follow – I shall persevere in the divine undertaking with which the merciful Love of Our Lord has wished to entrust us.

36 It is terrible how much harm we can do if we allow ourselves to be carried away by the fear or the shame of being seen as Christians in ordinary life.

37 There are some people who, when they speak about God or the apostolate, seem to feel the need to apologise. Perhaps it is because they have not discovered the value of human virtues, but, on the other hand, have been greatly deformed spiritually, and are too cowardly.

38 It is no use trying to please everyone. There will always be people who disagree, who complain. The way popular wisdom sums it up is: "What is good for the sheep is bad for the wolves."

39 Don't behave like someone frightened by an enemy whose only strength is his "aggressive voice".

40 You understand the work that is being carried out..., you have nothing against it (!). But you are very careful not to take part in it, and even more careful to ensure that others do not see or suspect you are lending a hand.

—You told me that you were afraid that people might think you are better than you are! —Is it not rather that you are afraid God and men might ask you to be more consistent?

41 He seemed to be totally determined... But, when he took up his pen to break with his girl friend, his indecision and lack of courage got the better of him: it was all very human and understandable, people said. According to some, it seems human love is not among the things which one has to leave behind in order to follow Jesus Christ totally, when He asks you.

42 Some people make mistakes through weakness — on account of the fragile clay we are all made of — but retain the Church's doctrine in its integrity.

They are the ones who, with the

grace of God, display heroic courage and humility in acknowledging their mistakes and *firmly* defending the truth.

43 Some call imprudence and rashness what is in fact faith and trust in God.

44 It is madness to trust in God...!, they say. –And is it not greater madness to trust in oneself, or in other men?

45 You wrote to tell me that you have at last gone to confession and that you experienced the humiliation of having to open the sewer – that is what you say – of your life to “a man”.

When will you get rid of that feeling of vain self-esteem? You will then go to confession extremely happy to show yourself as you are to “that man”, who, being anointed, is a Christ – Christ himself – and gives you absolution, God’s forgiveness.

46 May we have the courage always to act in public in accordance with our holy faith.

47 “We cannot be sectarian”, they told me with an air of reasonableness, referring to the way the Church’s doctrine remains firm.

Afterwards, when I let them see that whoever is in possession of the Truth cannot be sectarian, they realised their mistake.

48 To be convinced that it is ridiculous to take fashion as a principle for your behaviour, you need only to look at some old portraits.

49 I am glad that you love processions, and all the external practices of our Holy Mother the Church, so as to render God the worship due to him..., and that you enter into the spirit of them!

50 *Ego palam locutus sum mundo.* I have preached openly before the whole world, was the answer Jesus gave to Caiphas when the time had come for him to give his Life for us.

—And yet there are Christians who are ashamed to show *palam* —openly — veneration for Our Lord.



51 When the apostles had scattered, and the enraged mob made themselves hoarse shouting angrily at Jesus, the Holy Virgin Mary followed close behind her Son along the streets of Jerusalem. She did not draw back when the crowd cried out, nor did she leave Our Redeemer alone when each person, anonymous in that procession, was in his cowardice emboldened to ill-treat Christ.

Call on her with all your strength: *Virgo fidelis!*, Virgin most faithful!, and ask her that those of us who call ourselves God's friends may truly be so at all times.

## CHEERFULNESS

52 Nobody is happy on earth until he decides not to be. This is the way the path goes: suffering – in Christian terms! – the Cross; God's Will, Love; happiness here and, afterwards, eternally.

53 *Servite Domino in laetitia!* – I will serve God cheerfully. With a cheerfulness that is a consequence of my Faith, of my Hope and of my Love – and that will last for ever. For, as the Apostle assures us, *Dominus prope est!*... – the Lord follows me closely. I shall walk with Him, therefore, quite confidently, for the Lord is my Father, and with his help I shall fulfil his most lovable Will, even if I find it hard.

54 A piece of advice I have insisted on repeatedly: be cheerful, always cheerful. –Sadness is for those who do not consider themselves to be children of God.

55 I am trying to spare myself nothing, to help my younger brothers ‘tread softly’ as you asked us. There are so many joys to be found in ‘having it tough’.

56 Another man of faith wrote to me: “When you have to be on your own, you can notice clearly the help of your brothers. Now, when it comes to my mind that I have to put up with everything ‘all alone’, I often think that, if it weren’t for that ‘company we keep from afar’ – the holy Communion of Saints! – I would not be able to preserve this optimism which fills my heart.”

57 Don’t forget that sometimes one needs to have smiling faces around.

58 “You are all so cheerful, and one doesn’t expect that,” I heard someone say.  
It has been happening for a long

time; insistently and with diabolical determination, Christ's enemies never tire of complaining that the people who give themselves to God are all sullen. And, unfortunately, some of those who wish to be 'good' have lent support to those words, with their 'sad virtues'.

—We give you thanks, Lord, because you have chosen to count on our cheerful, very happy lives to erase that false caricature.

—I also ask You that we may not forget it.

59 May no one read sadness or sorrow in your face, when you spread in the world around you the sweet aroma of your sacrifice: the children of God should always be sowers of peace and joy.

60 The cheerfulness of a man of God, of a woman of God, has to overflow: it has to be calm, contagious, attractive...; in a few words, it has to be so supernatural, and natural, so infectious that it may bring others to follow Christian ways.

61 "Happy?" –The question made me think.

–Words have not yet been invented to express all that we feel – in the heart and in the will – when we know ourselves to be children of God.

62 Christmas time. You write: "Together with the holy expectation of Mary and Joseph, I also impatiently await the Child. How happy I shall feel at Bethlehem! I have a feeling that I won't be able to contain this joy without bounds. Yes! but, with Him, I also want to be born anew."

–I hope you really mean what you say!

63 A sincere resolution: to make the way lovable for others and easy, since life brings enough bitterness with it already.

64 What a wonderful thing to convert unbelievers, to gain souls!...

–Well, it is as pleasing, and even more pleasing to God, to avoid their being lost.

65 Once again you had gone back to your old follies!... And afterwards, when you returned, you didn't feel very cheerful, because you lacked humility.

It seems as if you obstinately refuse to learn from the second part of the parable of the prodigal son, and you still feel attached to the wretched happiness of the pig-swill. With your pride wounded by your weakness, you have not made up your mind to ask for pardon, and you have not realised that, if you humble yourself, the joyful welcome of your Father God awaits you, with a feast to mark your return and your new beginning.

66 It is true: we are worth nothing, we are nothing, we can do nothing, we have nothing. And, at the same time, in the middle of our daily struggle, obstacles and temptations are not lacking. But the *joy* of your brothers will banish all difficulties, as soon as you are back with them, because you will see them firmly relying on Him: *Quia tu es Deus fortitudo mea* – because you, Lord, are our strength.

67 The scene of the parable is being repeated: it is the same as with those people who were invited to the wedding feast. Some are afraid, others have their own concerns, many... make up stories or give silly excuses.

They put up resistance. That is why they feel the way they do: fed up, all in a muddle, listless, bored, bitter. And yet how easy it is to accept the divine invitation at every moment, and live a happy life, full of joy!

68 It is all too easy to say: "I'm useless; nothing turns out right for me – for us."

—Apart from not being true, that pessimism masks a great deal of laziness. There are things you do well, and things you do badly. Fill yourself with joy and with hope on account of the former; and face up to the latter – without losing heart – to put things right; and they will work out.

69 "Father, following your advice, I laugh at my weaknesses – without forgetting that I can't give in – and then I feel much happier.

But when I am silly enough to become sad, it seems to me that I am losing the way."

70 You asked me if I had a cross to bear. And I answered, "Yes, we always have to bear the Cross." —But it is a glorious Cross, a divine seal, the authentic guarantee of our being children of God. That is why we always walk along happily with the Cross.

71 You feel happier. But this time it is a fidgety sort of happiness, a bit impatient. With it comes the clear feeling that something is being wrested from you as a sacrifice.

Listen to me carefully: here on earth there is no perfect happiness. That is why, now, immediately, without complaining or feeling a victim, you should offer yourself as an oblation to God, with total and absolute self-surrender.

72 You are enjoying a few days of great happiness, and your soul is filled with light and colour. And, curiously, the reasons for your joy are the same ones that at other



times disheartened you! .

It is always the same: it all depends on the point of view. *Laetetur cor quaerentium Dominum!* – when you seek the Lord, your heart always overflows with happiness.

73 There are men who have no faith, who are sad and hesitant because of the emptiness of their existence, and exposed like weathercocks to “changeable” circumstances. How different that is from our trusting life as Christians, which is joyful, firm and solid, because we know and are absolutely convinced of our supernatural destiny!

74 You are not happy because you make everything revolve around yourself as if you were always the centre: you have a stomach-ache, or you are tired, or they have said this or that...

–Have you ever tried thinking about Him, and through Him, about others?

75 *Miles* – soldier – so the Apostle calls a Christian.

So it is that in this holy and Christian war of love and peace for the happiness of all souls, there are, in God's ranks, tired, hungry soldiers, covered in wounds... but happy. For they bear in their hearts the sure light of victory.

76 "I am sending you, Father, the resolution always to smile: a heart that is jubilant, even if it be mauled."

—I think it is a splendid resolution. I pray that you may keep it.

77 Sometimes you feel that you are beginning to lose heart and that everything is getting on top of you. This kills your good desires, and you can hardly manage to overcome this feeling even by making acts of hope... —Never mind: this is a good time to ask God for more grace. Then, go on! Renew your joy for the struggle, even though you might lose the odd skirmish.

78 You don't feel like doing anything and there is nothing you look forward to. It is like a dark cloud. Showers of sadness fell, and you experienced a strong sensation

of being hemmed in. And, to crown it all, a despondency set in, which grew out of a more or less objective fact: you have been struggling for so many years..., and you are still so far behind, so far.

All this is necessary, and God has things in hand. To attain *gaudium cum pace* – true peace and joy – we have to add to the conviction of our divine filiation, which fills us with optimism, the acknowledgement of our own personal weakness.

79 You have become younger! You notice, in fact, that getting to know God better has made you regain in a short time the uncomplicated and happy age of your youth, including the security and joy – without any childishness – of spiritual childhood... You look around, and you realise that the same thing has happened to others: the years since they met with the Lord have gone by and, having reached maturity, they are strengthened with a permanent youth and happiness. They don't look young. They *are* young and cheerful!

This reality of the interior life, attracts, confirms and wins over souls.

Give thanks for it daily *ad Deum qui laetificat iuventutem* – to God who fills your youth with joy.

80 You do not lack God's grace. Therefore, if you respond to it, you will be sure to win.

Victory depends on you: your strength and drive – together with that grace – are reason enough for you to have the optimism of one who knows victory is assured.

81 Perhaps yesterday you were one of those people whose ideals have gone sour, who are defrauded in their human ambitions. Today, now that God has entered into your life – thank you, my God! – you laugh and sing and carry your smile, your Love and your happiness wherever you go.

82 There are many who feel unhappy, just because they have too much of everything. –Christians, if they really behave as God's children, will suffer discomfort, heat, tiredness, cold... But they

will never lack joy, because that – all that! – is ordained or permitted by Him who is the source of true happiness.

83 Faced by all those men without faith, without hope; by minds desperately near the borders of anguish, seeking for a meaning in their life, you found your purpose: Him!

This discovery will permanently inject a new happiness into your existence, it will transform you, and present you with an immense daily hoard of beautiful things of which you were unaware, and which show you the joyful expanse of that broad path that leads you to God.

84 Your happiness on earth is identified with your fidelity to faith, to purity and to the way God has marked out for you.

85 Give thanks to God that you are happy, with a deep joy which has no need to be noisy.

86 With God, I thought, every day seems more attractive. I can see “little bits”

at a time. One day I notice some wonderful detail; on another, I discover a sight I had not seen before... At this rate, it is impossible to say what will happen next.

Then, I noticed that He was reassuring me: "Your happiness will grow greater every day, for you will be drawn deeper and deeper into that divine adventure, into that great 'complication' with which you have become involved. And you will realise that I will never abandon you."

87 Happiness is a consequence of self-surrender. It is re-affirmed every time you turn the water-wheel.

88 What changeless joy you feel after having given yourself to God! But you must feel a great concern and desire for everyone to share in your joy!

89 All the things that are now worrying you can be solved by making an effort to smile for love of God.

90 Optimism? Yes, always! Even when things seem to turn out badly: perhaps that

is the time to break into a song, with a *Gloria*, because you have sought refuge in Him, and nothing but good can come to you from Him.

91 Hope does not mean beginning to see the light, but trusting with one's eyes closed that the Lord possesses the light fully, and lives in its clarity. He is the Light.

92 Every Christian has the duty to bring peace and joy to his own surroundings on earth. This cheerful crusade of manliness will move even shrivelled or rotten hearts, and raise them to God.

93 If you cut any hint of envy out at the roots, and if you sincerely rejoice in other people's success, you will not lose your joy.

94 That friend of mine came up to me: "They tell me you are in love." —I was very surprised and the only thing I could think to ask was where he got that news.

He said that he could read it in my eyes, which shone with joy.

95 What must the cheerful way that Jesus looked upon people have been like? It must have been the same which shone from the eyes of his Mother who could not contain her joy – *Magnificat anima mea Dominum!* – and her soul glorified the Lord while she carried Him within her and by her side.

Oh, Mother!: May we, like you, rejoice to be with Him and to hold Him.



## DARING

96 Don't be narrow-minded men or women who are immature, short-sighted and incapable of embracing our supernatural Christian outlook as children of God. God and daring!

97 Daring is not imprudence, or unreflective bravado, or simple pluck.

Daring is fortitude, a cardinal virtue, a requirement of the soul's life.

98 You made up your mind after reflection, rather than with any burning enthusiasm. Although you would have very much liked to feel it, there was no room for sentiment: you gave yourself to God when

you were convinced that that is what He wanted.

And, since then, you have *felt* no serious doubts; rather you experience a calm and peaceful joy, which sometimes overflows. It is thus that God rewards the daring feats of Love.

99 I read a proverb which is very popular in some countries: "God owns the world, but he rents it out to the brave", and it made me think.

—What are you waiting for?

100 I am not the apostle I should be. I am... too timid.

Could it not be that you are faint-hearted, because your love is small? It is time to change!

101 The difficulties you have met have made you shrink back, and you have become "prudent, moderate and objective".

—Remember that you have always despised those terms, when they became synonyms for cowardly, fainthearted and comfort-seeking.

102 Fear? That is only for those who know they are acting badly. For you, never.

103 There are a great number of Christians who would be apostles... if they were not afraid.

They are the same people who then complain, because the Lord —they say! — has abandoned them. How do *they* treat God?

104 There are many of us; with God's help, we can reach everywhere, they exclaim enthusiastically.

Why does fear hold you back then? With divine grace, you can become a saint, which is what matters.

105 When you feel your conscience gnawing at you for not having done something good, it is a sign that the Lord did not want it to be omitted.

—Just so. Moreover, you can be sure that you *could* have done it, with God's grace.

106 Let us not forget it: when fulfilling

the divine Will, you can get over obstacles, or under them... or you can go round them. But... they can be overcome!

107 When one is working to extend an apostolic undertaking, "No" must never be taken for a final answer: you have to insist!

108 You are too "cautious" and not very "supernatural" and that is why you are a bit too clever: don't start inventing your own "snags" and trying to solve them all.

—Perhaps the person you speak to is less "clever" or maybe more generous than you are, and as he can count on God, he won't raise so many objections.

109 There are some ways of acting that are so careful that, in a word, they are just pusillanimous.

110 Rest assured: when you work for God, there are no difficulties that cannot be overcome, nor discouragements that will make you abandon the task, nor failures worthy of the name, however unfruitful the results may seem.

111 Your faith is not operative enough; it seems that you are over-pious, rather than a man who is struggling to be a saint.

112 Be calm! Be daring!

With these virtues you must rout the fifth column of people who are lukewarm, who are cowards or traitors.

113 You assured me that you wanted to fight without respite, and now you come to me with a long face.

Look, even humanly speaking, it is good not to find it all done for you, with no hitches. Something – a lot! – depends on you. Otherwise, how could you *become* a saint?

114 You won't commit yourself to working in that supernatural enterprise, because – you say – you are afraid of not knowing how to please, or of making some unfortunate mistake. If you thought more about God, those excuses would disappear.

115 Sometimes I think that a few enemies of God and his Church live off the

fear of many good people, and I am filled with shame.

116 As we talked, he assured me that he never wanted to leave the hut where he lived, because he preferred to count the beams of "his" shack rather than the stars in heaven.

—There are many like him who are incapable of leaving their own petty things so as to raise their eyes to heaven: it is time they acquired a loftier vision!

117 I understand the supernatural and human joy of one man who had the good fortune of being in the vanguard of the divine sowing.

"It is wonderful to have the feeling of being the only one, to stir up a whole city and its surroundings", he would often say, fully convinced.

—Don't wait until you can count on more means, or until others come: souls have need of you today, now.

118 Be daring in your prayer, and the Lord will turn you from a pessimist into an

optimist; from being timid, to being daring, from being feeble-spirited to being a man of faith, an apostle!

119 Those problems which used to overwhelm you – and seemed like enormous mountains – disappeared completely. They were solved in a divine way, as when Our Lord commanded the winds and the waters to be calm.

–And to think that you still doubted!

120 “Don’t help the Holy Spirit so much!”, a friend of mine said, jokingly, but sounding very scared.

I answered: I think we “help him” very little.

121 When I see so much cowardice, so much false prudence... in both men and women, I burn with the desire to ask them: Are faith and trust only to be preached, then? Not practised?

122 You find yourself in a position which seems rather strange: on the one hand, you feel fainthearted, as you look

inwards; on the other, sure, encouraged, as you look upwards.

—Don't worry: it is a sign that you are beginning to know yourself better and — more importantly! — that you are beginning to know Him better.

**123** Do you see? With Him you *have* been able. Why are you surprised?

—Be convinced: there is nothing to be surprised about. If you trust in God — really trust! — things work out easily. And, what is more, you always go further than you imagined you could.

**124** Do you want to be daring in a holy way, so that God may act through you? Have recourse to Mary, and she will accompany you along the path of humility, so that, when faced by what to the human mind is impossible, you may be able to answer with a *fiat!* — be it done!, which unites the earth to Heaven.



## THE STRUGGLE

→ 125 Not all can become rich, wise, famous... Yet, all of us – yes, *all of us* – are called to be saints.

→ 126 To be faithful to God requires a constant battle. Hand-to-hand combat, man to man – the old man against the man of God – in one small thing after another, without giving in.

127 The test, I don't deny it, proves to be very hard: you have to go uphill, "against the grain".

–What is my advice? That you must say: *omnia in bonum*, everything that happens, "everything that happens to me", is for my own good... Therefore do accept

what seems so hard to you, as a sweet and pleasant reality.

128 Nowadays it is not enough for men and women to be good. Moreover, it is not good enough to be satisfied with being nearly... good. It is necessary to be 'revolutionary'.

Faced by hedonism, faced by the pagan and materialistic wares that we are being offered, Christ wants objectors! – rebels of Love!

129 Whoever really wants to achieve sanctity, takes no breaks or holidays.

130 Some behave, throughout their lives, as though Our Lord had only talked of self-giving and upright behaviour to those who did not find it hard – they don't exist! – or to those who don't need to fight.

→ They forget that Jesus said, for all: the Kingdom of heaven is won by violence, by the holy battle of every moment.

131 What eagerness many show for reform!  
Would it not be better for us all to

reform ourselves, each one of us, so as to fulfil faithfully what is laid down?

**132** You play around with temptations, you put yourself in danger, you fool around with your sight and with your imagination, you chat about... stupidities. And then you are anxious that doubts, scruples, confusion, sadness and discouragement might assail you.

—You must admit that you are not very consistent.

**133** After the initial enthusiasm, there began the doubts, hesitations and fears. You are worried about your studies, your family, your financial situation, and, above all, the thought that you are not up to it, that perhaps you are of no use, that you lack experience in life.

I will give you a sure means of overcoming such fears — temptations coming from the devil or from your lack of generosity! *Despise them*: remove those recollections from your memory. The Master already preached this unequivocally twenty centuries ago: “Don’t look back...”

**134** We have to foster in our souls a true horror for sin. Lord – say it with a contrite heart – may I never offend you again!

But don't be frightened when you become aware of the burden of your poor body and of human passions: it would be silly and childishly naive to find out now that "this" exists. Your wretchedness is not an obstacle but a spur for you to become more united to God and seek him constantly, because He purifies us.

**135** If your imagination bubbles over with thoughts about yourself and creates fanciful situations and circumstances which would not normally find a place in your way, then these will foolishly distract you. They will dampen your ardour and separate you from the presence of God. This is vanity.

If your imagination revolves around others, you will easily fall into the defect of passing judgement when this is not your responsibility. You will interpret their behaviour not at all objectively but in a mean way. This is rash judgement.

If your imagination hovers around

your own talents and ways of speaking, or with the general admiration that you inspire in others, then you will be in danger of losing your rectitude of intention, and of providing fodder for your pride.

Generally, letting your imagination loose is a waste of time, and, if it is not controlled, it opens the door to a whole string of voluntary temptations.

—Do not leave off the practice of interior mortification for even a single day!

**136** Do not be so stupidly naive as to think you have to go through temptations, to be sure that you are firm in your vocation. It would be like asking someone to stop your heart, to show you that you want to live.

**137** Do not enter into dialogue with temptation. Allow me to repeat it: have the courage to run away and the moral strength not to dally with your weakness or wonder how far you can go. Break off, with no concessions!

**138** You have no excuse whatsoever.

You have only yourself to blame. If you are aware – and you know it well enough – that going along that path, reading those things, keeping that company, can bring you to a precipice, why do you persist in thinking that perhaps it is a short cut which will help you to develop or which makes your personality more mature?

You must change your plan radically, even though it demands a greater effort and means fewer amusements at your disposal. It is high time you behaved as a responsible person.

139 The irresponsibility of so many men and women who make no effort to avoid deliberate venial sins, pains Our Lord very much. It's normal, they think, and seek to excuse themselves by saying that at those stumbling blocks we all fall!

Listen carefully: most of that mob, which condemned Christ and put him to death, also began *only* by shouting – just like the others – by going to the Garden of Olives – with the rest of them...

In the end, still carried along by what "everyone" was doing, they did not know

how to draw back or did not want to... and they crucified Jesus!

—Now, after twenty centuries, we still have not learned.

**140** Ups and downs. You have many, *too many*, ups and downs.

The reason is clear: till now, you have led an easy life, and you are reluctant to admit that there is a notable gap between “wanting to give” and “giving” oneself.

**141** As, sooner or later, you are surely bound to stumble upon the evidence of your own personal wretchedness, I wish to forewarn you about some of the temptations which the devil will suggest to you and which you should reject straight away. These include the thought that God has forgotten about you, that your call to the apostolate is in vain, and that the weight of sorrow and of the sins of the world are greater than your strength as an apostle...

—None of this is true!

**142** If you are really fighting, you need

to make an examination of conscience.

Take care of the daily examination: find out if you feel the sorrow of Love, for not getting to know Our Lord as you should.

**143** In the same way that many go to see *first stones* being laid, without bothering about whether the works then begun will ever be finished, sinners deceive themselves with their “last times”.

**144** When it is a matter of “breaking off” – never forget it – the “last time” has to be the one before, the one that has already happened...

**145** I advise you to try sometime to return... to the beginning of your *first conversion*, which, if it is not becoming like children, is very much like it. In the spiritual life we have to let ourselves be led with complete trust, single-mindedly and without fear. We have to speak with absolute clarity about what we have in our mind and in our soul.



**146** How are you going to get out of that state of lukewarmness and lamentable languor if you do not make use of the means? You struggle very little, and when you make an effort, you do so as if annoyed and uneasy. You even seem to hope that your feeble efforts will produce no results, so that you can then justify yourself and you will not have to make demands on yourself and others will not ask any more of you.

—It is your own will you are following, not God's. If you don't change in earnest you will neither be happy nor be able to obtain the peace you now lack.

—Humble yourself before God, and try really to want to.

**147** It is such a waste of time and such a human way of looking at things, when everything is reduced to tactics of a sort, as if the secret of being effective lay there.

—They forget that God's *tactic* is charity, the Love without limits: thus it was that He bridged the unbridgeable gap that man, through sin, opens up between Heaven and earth.

**148** Apply a *savage* sincerity to your examination of conscience; that is to say, be courageous. It is the same as when you look at yourself in the mirror to know where you have hurt yourself or where the dirt is or where your blemishes are, so that you can get rid of them.

**149** I must warn you against a ploy of *satan* – yes, without a capital, because he deserves no more – who tries to make use of the most ordinary circumstances, to turn us away, slightly or greatly, from the way that leads us to God.

If you are struggling, and even more if you are really struggling, you should not be surprised at feeling tired or at having sometimes to “go against the grain”, without any spiritual or human consolation. See what someone wrote to me some time ago, and which I kept for those who naively consider that grace does away with nature: “Father, for a few days now I have been feeling tremendously lazy and lacking in enthusiasm for fulfilling the plan of life. I have to force myself to do everything, and I have very little taste for it. Pray for me so

that this crisis may soon pass, for it makes me suffer a lot to think it could make me turn from my way.”

—I answered only: did you not know that Love demands sacrifice? Read the words of the Master slowly: “Whoever does not take up his Cross *quotidie* — every day — is not worthy of Me.” And further on: “I will not leave you orphans...” Our Lord allows that dryness of yours, which you find so hard, so that you may love Him more, so that you may trust only in Him, so that you may co-redeem with the Cross, so that you may meet Him.

**150** “The devil doesn’t seem to be very clever”, you told me. “I can’t understand how he can be so stupid: he always uses the same deceits, the same falsehoods...”

—You are absolutely right. But we men are less clever, and we do not learn from the experience of others... And satan counts on all that in order to tempt us.

**151** I once heard of a curious thing that happens in great battles. Although victory may be certain beforehand, because of the

superiority in numbers and equipment, later, in the heat of combat, there are times when defeat threatens through the weakness of one flank. Then peremptory orders come from the high command, and where the flank was in difficulties the breach is stemmed.

—I thought about you and me. With God, who does not lose battles, we will always be the victors. That is why in the struggle for sanctity, if you feel lacking in strength, you should listen to the commands, do what you are told, let yourself be helped... for He does not fail.

**152** You opened your heart sincerely to your director, speaking in the presence of God..., and it was marvellous to see how you yourself were finding the proper answers to your evasive attempts.

Let us love spiritual direction!

**153** I will grant that you behave properly... But, allow me to speak sincerely. You must admit that you are doing things in such a leisurely way that, apart from not being entirely happy, you

remain very far from holiness.

That is why I ask: Do you really behave properly? Could it be that you have a mistaken idea of what is proper?

**154** If you fool around, are inwardly and outwardly frivolous, hesitant when faced with temptation, wanting and not wanting, it will be impossible for you to advance in the interior life.

**155** I have always thought that many mean by “tomorrow” or “later”, a resistance to grace.

**156** Another paradox of the spiritual way: the soul which has less need to reform its behaviour struggles harder to do so, and does not stop until it has succeeded. And the contrary is also true.

**157** You sometimes invent “problems” for yourself, because you do not go to the root of your behaviour.

—All you need is a determined change of attack: to fulfil your duty loyally and be faithful to the indications that you

have been given in spiritual direction.

**158** You have become more keenly aware of the urgency, of the "pre-occupation" of being a saint; and you have gone into battle daily with no hesitation, convinced that you have to root out bravely any symptom of being fond of comfort.

Later, while talking to Our Lord in your prayer you understood that fighting is a synonym for Love, and you asked for a greater Love, with no fear of the struggle awaiting you, since you would be fighting for Him, with Him and in Him.

**159** Complications?... Be sincere, and acknowledge that you prefer to be the slave of some selfish whim of yours, rather than serve God or that soul. —Admit it!

**160** *Beatus vir qui suffert tentationem...*  
Blessed is the man who suffers temptation because, after he has been tested, he will receive the crown of Life.

Is your heart filled with joy when you realise that this interior sport is a source of peace which can never be exhausted?



**161** *Nunc coepi!* – now I begin! This is the cry of a soul in love which, at every moment, whether it has been faithful or lacking in generosity, renews its desire to serve – to love! – our God with a wholehearted loyalty.

**162** It really did hurt you deeply when you were told that what you were looking for was not your conversion, but a coffer for your miseries. In that way you would be able to carry on comfortably – but with a taste of bitter aloes – bearing that sorry load.

**163** You don't know whether it is physical depression or a sort of interior tiredness that has come over you, or both at the same time... You fight without fighting, without the desire of an authentic positive improvement, to transmit the joy and love of Christ to souls.

I wish to remind you of the clear words of the Holy Spirit: only those who fight *legitime*, – genuinely, in spite of everything – will be crowned.

**164** I could behave better, show more decision and spread around more enthusiasm... Why don't I?

Because – forgive my frankness – you are a buffoon. The devil knows full well that one of the worst-guarded doors of the soul is that of human foolishness: vanity. That is where he attacks with all his might: pseudo-sentimental memories, the hysterical form of a black-sheep complex, the unfounded impression of a lack of freedom...

What are you waiting for in order to follow the Master's injunction: Watch and pray, for you know not the day nor the hour?

**165** You told me with a boasting but uncertain swagger that some go up and others go down... And others, like yourself!, are just idling.

Your indolence saddened me, and I added: idlers are made to shift by those going up; and – normally with greater vigour – also by those going down. Consider what an uncomfortable attitude you are adopting!

The holy bishop of Hippo already



pointed it out: not to go forward is to go back.

**166** In your life, there are two things that do not fit together: your head and your heart.

Your intelligence – enlightened by faith – shows you the way clearly. It can also point out the difference between following that way heroically or stupidly. Above all, it places before you the divine greatness and beauty of the undertakings the Trinity leaves in our hands.

Your feelings, on the other hand, become attached to everything you despise, even while you consider it despicable. It seems as if a thousand trifles were awaiting the least opportunity, and as soon as your poor will is weakened, through physical tiredness or lack of supernatural outlook, those little things pile up and excite your imagination, until they form a mountain that oppresses and discourages you. Things such as the rough edges of your work, your resistance to obedience; the lack of proper means; the will-o'-the-wisp attractions of an easy life; greater or smaller repugnant

temptations; bouts of over-sentimentality; tiredness; the bitter taste of spiritual mediocrity... And sometimes also fear; fear because you know God wants you to be a saint, and you are not a saint.

Allow me to talk to you bluntly. You have more than enough "reasons" to turn back, and you lack the resolution to correspond to the grace that He grants you, since He has called you to be another Christ, *ipse Christus!* – Christ himself. You have forgotten the Lord's admonition to the Apostle: "My grace is enough for you!", which is confirmation that, if you want to, you can.

**167** Make up the time you have lost resting on the laurels of your self-complacency, and thinking what a good person you are, as if it were enough just to keep going, without stealing or killing.

Speed up the pace of your piety and your work: you still have such a long way to go: Live happily with everyone, even with those who annoy you, and make an effort to love – to serve! – those whom you despised before.

**168** You revealed your past wounds – full of pus – in Confession. And the priest dealt with your soul like a good doctor, like a conscientious doctor. He made an incision where he had to, and would not let the wound heal over until everything had been cleaned out. –Be grateful.

**169** Tackling serious matters with a sporting spirit gives very good results. Perhaps I have lost several games? –Very well, but – if I persevere – in the end I shall win.

**170** Change now, when you still feel young... How difficult it is to put things right when the soul has aged.

**171** *Felix culpa!*, sings the Church... Blessed be your mistake – I whisper in your ear – if it has prompted you not to sin again, and if it has also made you understand and help your neighbour better, for he is of no worse quality than you:

**172** “Is it possible”, you ask after having rejected the temptation, “is it possible, Lord, that I could be... that other one?”

**173** I am going to summarise your clinical history: here I fall and there I get up. The latter is what matters. —So continue with that interior struggle, even though you go at the pace of the tortoise. Forward!

—You know well, my son, where you can end up, if you don't fight: one depth calls another and another.

**174** You are ashamed, before God, and before the others. You have discovered filth within yourself both old and renewed: there is no evil instinct or tendency that you do not feel under your skin. And you also carry a cloud of uncertainty in your heart. Furthermore, temptation arises when you least want it or expect it, when your will is weakened by tiredness.

You no longer know whether it humiliates you, although it hurts you to see yourself like this. But let it hurt you because of Him, and for Love of Him. This contrition of love will help you to remain vigilant, for the fight will last as long as we live.

**175** You are consumed by the desire to

seal once more the self-dedication you made some time ago: remembering that you are a son of God and living like one too.

—Put your many weaknesses and infidelities in the Lord's hands. For that is also the only way to lessen their weight.

→ **176** Renewal is not relaxation.

**177** Days on retreat. Recollection in order to know God, to know yourself and thus to make progress. A necessary time for discovering where and how you should change your life. What should I do? What should I avoid?

**178** There should be no repetition of what happened last year.

“How did the retreat go?” you were asked. And you answered: “We had a very good rest”...

**179** Days of silence and of intense grace... Prayer face to face with God...

I broke out into thanksgiving, on seeing those people, mature in years and experience, who opened out to the touch of

grace. They responded like children, eagerly grasping the chance to convert their lives, even now, into something useful... which would make up for all the times they have gone astray and for all their lost opportunities.

—Recalling that scene, I put it to you: do not neglect your struggle in the interior life.

**180** *Auxilium christianorum!* —Help of Christians, says the litany of Loreto with confidence. Have you tried to repeat that aspiration in time of difficulty? If you do it with faith, with the tenderness of a daughter or a son, you will discover the power of the intercession of your Holy Mother Mary, who will lead you to victory.

## FISHERS OF MEN

**181** We could see, while we talked, the lands of that continent. A light was enkindled in your eyes, your soul was filled with impatience, and, thinking about those peoples, you said: Could it be possible that on the other side of those seas, the grace of God is rendered ineffective?

You then answered your own question: In his infinite goodness, He wishes to use docile instruments.

**182** What compassion you feel for them!... You would like to cry out to them that they are wasting their time... Why are they so blind, and why can't they perceive what you – a miserable creature – have seen? Why don't they go for the best?



—Pray and mortify yourself. Then *you have the duty* to wake them up, one by one, explaining to them — also one by one — that they, like you, can find a divine way, without leaving the place they occupy in society.

**183** You began in good heart. But little by little your spirit has shrunk... And you are going to end up in your own poor shell, if you continue to let your horizons become smaller and smaller.

—You have to allow your heart to expand more and more, with real hunger for the apostolate! Out of a hundred souls we are interested in a hundred.

**184** Thank the Lord for the paternal and maternal tenderness he continues to show for you.

You always had those dreams of great adventures, and you have committed yourself to a wonderful enterprise...which leads you to holiness.

I repeat: thank God for this by leading an apostolic life.



**185** When you launch out into the apostolate, be convinced that it is always a question of making people happy, very happy: Truth is inseparable from true joy.

**186** People from different countries, different races, and very different backgrounds and professions... When you speak to them about God, you become aware of the human and supernatural value of your vocation as an apostle. It is as if you are re-living, in its total reality, the miracle of the first preaching of Our Lord's disciples. Phrases spoken in a strange tongue, which open up new ways, have been heard by each one, in the depth of his heart in his own language. And in your mind you can see that scene taking on a new life, in which "Parthians, Medes and Elamites" have come joyfully to God.

**187** Listen to me carefully and echo my words: Christianity is Love; getting to know God is a most positive experience; concern for others – the apostolate – is not an extra luxury, the task of a few.

—Now that you know this, fill

yourself with joy, because your life has acquired a completely different meaning; and act in consequence.

**188** Naturalness, sincerity and cheerfulness are indispensable conditions for the apostle to attract people.

**189** The way Jesus called the first twelve could not have been simpler: "Come and follow me."

Since you are always looking for excuses not to keep on with your task, there is one consideration that fits you like a glove: the human knowledge of those first apostles was very poor, and yet what an impact they made on those who listened to them!

—Never forget this: it is He who continues to do the work through each one of us.

**190** Vocations to the apostolate are sent by God. But you must not cease to make use of the means: prayer, mortification, study or work, friendship, supernatural outlook... interior life!

**191** When I speak to you about “apostolate of friendship”, I mean a *personal* friendship, self-sacrificing and sincere: face to face, heart to heart.

**192** In the apostolate of friendship and trust, the first step has to be understanding, service — and holy intransigence in doctrine.

**193** Those who have met Christ cannot shut themselves in their own little world: how sad such a limitation would be! They must open out like a fan in order to reach all souls. Each one has to create — and widen — a circle of friends, whom he can influence with his professional prestige, with his behaviour, with his friendship, so that Christ may exercise his influence by means of that professional prestige, that behaviour, that friendship.

**194** You have to be a live ember that sets fire to whatever it touches. And, when your surroundings are incapable of catching fire, you have to raise their spiritual temperature.

—If not, you are wasting time miserably, and wasting the time of those around you.

**195** When there is zeal for souls, good people can always be found, fertile soil can always be discovered. There is no excuse!

**196** Rest assured, there are many people there who can understand your way. There are also souls who, whether they know it or not, are looking for Christ and have not found Him. But “How can they hear about Him, if nobody tells them?”

**197** Don’t tell me that you care for your interior life, if you are not carrying out an intense and ceaseless apostolate. The Lord — whom you assure me you are close to — wishes all men to be saved.

**198** That way is very hard, he told you. And, on hearing it, you heartily agreed, remembering that bit about the Cross being a sure sign of the true way... But your friend noticed only the rough part of the road, without bringing to mind Jesus’

promise: "My yoke is sweet."

Remind him about it, because – perhaps when he realises it – he will give himself.

**199** He hasn't got the time? – So much the better. Christ is interested precisely in those who do not have the time.

**200** When you consider how many people do not take advantage of a wonderful opportunity, but allow Jesus to pass by, think: where does this clear calling which was so providential, and showed me my way, come from?

–Meditate on this every day: an apostle has always to be another Christ, Christ himself.

**201** Don't be surprised and don't be cowed because he has reproached you with having placed him face to face with Christ, nor because he may have added, indignantly: "Now I can't live in peace unless I make up my mind..."

Pray for him... It would be useless to try to calm him down. What may have happened is that some previous worry, the

voice of his own conscience, has now come to the fore.

**202** Are they scandalized because you have talked about their giving themselves to God to people who had never thought about that problem?

—Well, what does it matter, if you have the vocation of being an apostle of apostles?

**203** You don't get through to people because you speak a different "language". I advise you to be natural.

It's all due to that artificial formation of yours!

**204** Do you hesitate to launch yourself into speaking about God, about a Christian life, about vocation... because you do not want to cause suffering? You forget that it is not you who are doing the calling, it is He: *Ego scio quos elegerim* — I know well those I have chosen.

Moreover, I should not like to think that behind this false respect lurked a spirit of comfort or lukewarmness. At this stage, do you still prefer poor human friendship to

the friendship of God?

**205** You have spoken to one person and another, and yet another, because you are consumed by zeal for souls.

One took fright; another consulted a “prudent” man, who guided him badly... — Persevere: and no one afterwards will be able to excuse himself by saying *Quia nemo nos conduxit* — nobody has called us.

**206** I understand your holy impatience, but at the same time you must realise that there are some who need to think things over for a long time and others who will respond all in good time... Wait for them with open arms. Add the spice of abundant prayer and mortification to your holy impatience. They will be more youthful and generous when they come. They will have got rid of their *bourgeois* approach, and they will be all the more courageous.

Think how God is waiting for them!

**207** An indispensable requirement in the apostolate is faith, which is often shown by constancy in speaking about God, even



though the fruits are slow to appear.

If we persevere and carry on in the firm conviction that the Lord wills it, signs of a Christian revolution will appear around you, everywhere. Some will follow the call, others will take their interior life seriously, and others – the weakest – will at least be forewarned.

**208** Days of real excitement: three more people!

The words of Jesus are being fulfilled: "My Father's name has been glorified if you yield abundant fruit and prove yourselves my disciples."

**209** You made me smile, because I know what you meant when you said: I am enthusiastic about the possibility of going to new lands and opening a breach there, perhaps very far away... I would like to find out if there are men on the moon...

–Ask the Lord to increase that apostolic zeal of yours.

**210** At times, seeing those souls asleep, one feels an enormous desire to shout at



them, to make them take notice, to wake them up from that terrible torpor they have fallen into. It is so sad to see them walk like a blind man hitting out with his stick, without finding the way!

—I can well understand how the tears of Jesus over Jerusalem sprang from his perfect charity.

**211** Dig further every day into the apostolic depths of your Christian vocation. He unfurled a banner to be followed twenty centuries ago, for you and me to proclaim aloud to men. It is indeed meant for all those who have a sincere heart and are capable of loving... What clearer invitations do you need than these: *Ignem veni mittere in terram* — I have come to bring fire to the earth, and the thought of those two thousand five hundred million souls who still do not know Christ!

**212** *Hominem non habeo* — I have no one to help me. This —unfortunately! — could be said by many who are spiritually sick and paralytic, who could be useful — and should be useful.

Lord: may I never remain indifferent to souls.

**213** Ask with me for a new Pentecost, which will once again set the world alight.

**214** "If any man comes to me without hating his father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life too, he can be no disciple of mine."

Every day I see more clearly, Lord, that family ties, if they do not pass through your most lovable Heart, are, for some, a permanent source of the cross; for others they are a cause of more or less direct temptation against perseverance; for others again, the reason why they are totally ineffective; and, for all, a dead weight which impedes their total surrender.

**215** The ploughshare that breaks up the earth and opens up the furrow sees neither the seed nor the harvest.

**216** When you made up your mind, you would discover something new every day.

Do you remember how it used to be when you constantly asked yourself: "How should this be done?".. But you then kept on experiencing doubts or disappointments...

Now you always find an exact answer which is clear and fully reasoned. And, when you listen to the answers you get to your often childish questions, you think: "Jesus must have looked after the first Twelve like this."

**217** Vocations, Lord, more vocations! It doesn't matter whether I did the sowing or someone else: it was You, Jesus, who sowed the seed with our hands! All I know is that you have promised that the fruit will ripen; *et fructus vester maneat* – and your fruit will endure.

**218** Be honest. If there are people who tell you that you have been trying "to catch them", admit that this is what you want to do. But there is no need for them to worry! Because, if they haven't got a vocation – if He does not call them – they won't come; and if they have, what a shame for them to

end up like the rich young man in the Gospel: alone and sad.

**219** As an apostle you have a great and beautiful task. You find yourself at the place where grace and the freedom of each soul meet. You are also present at that most solemn occasion in the life of some men: their encounter with Christ.

**220** It seems as if you have been individually picked, he said.

And that is right!

**221** Be sure of this: you need to be fully formed to face the rush of people that is going to press upon us with a specific and urgent question: "Well then, what's to be done?"

**222** Here is a recipe to make your apostolic spirit effective: make definite plans, not for the whole week but for the day ahead, for this moment and the next.

**223** Christ expects a lot from your work. But you will have to look for souls, as the

Good Shepherd went after the hundredth sheep: without waiting to be called. Then make use of your friends to do good to others. Tell each one of them that nobody can feel at ease with a spiritual life which, after filling him, does not overflow with apostolic zeal.

**224** It's intolerable that you should waste your time with "your own silly little concerns" when there are so many souls awaiting you.

**225** Doctrinal apostolate: that will always be your apostolate.

**226** The marvel of Pentecost consecrates all the different ways: it can never be understood as monopoly or the appreciation of only one way to the detriment of the others.

Pentecost means an unlimited variety of tongues, of methods, of forms of meeting God: not violent uniformity.

**227** You wrote: A young fellow, who was going North, joined our group. He was

a miner. He sang well and joined in with us. I prayed for him until he arrived at his station. When he got off, he said: "I'd have loved to continue the journey with you!"

I was immediately reminded of that *mane nobiscum* – stay with us, Lord! And I asked him again with faith that others might "see Him" in each one of us, as companions along "His way".

**228** The masses have been going off down "the road of a justified discontentment" and continue to do so.

It hurts... but, how many we have caused to be disaffected among those who are spiritually or materially in need!

—Christ may once more be set among the poor and the humble: it is precisely with them that he is more at ease.

**229** Teacher: may you be eager to make your pupils understand quickly what has cost you hours of study to see clearly.

**230** The wish *to teach* and *to teach from the heart* creates in pupils a gratitude which is a suitable soil for the apostolate.

**231** I like the motto: "Let each wayfarer follow his way", the road God has marked out for him, to be followed faithfully, lovingly, even though it is hard.

**232** What an extraordinary lesson is found in each one of the teachings of the New Testament! The Master, before ascending to the right hand of the Father, told the disciples: "Go and preach to all nations", and they had remained full of peace. But they still had doubts: they did not know what to do, and they gathered around Mary, Queen of Apostles, so as to become zealous proclaimers of the Truth which will save the world.



## SUFFERING

**233** You spoke about the scenes in the life of Jesus which moved you most: when he met men suffering greatly... when he brought peace and health to those whose bodies and souls were racked with pain... You were inspired – you went on – seeing him cure leprosy, restore sight to the blind, heal the paralytic at the pool: the poor beggar forgotten by everybody. You are able to contemplate Him as He was, so profoundly human, so close at hand!

–Well... Jesus continues being the same as then.

**234** You asked Our Lord to let you suffer a little for Him. But when suffering comes in such a normal, human form – family



difficulties and problems... or those thousand awkward things of ordinary life – you find it hard to see Christ behind it. –Open your hands willingly to those nails... and your sorrow will be turned into joy.

**235** Don't complain if you suffer. It is the prized and valued stone that is polished.

Does it hurt? –Allow yourself to be cut, gratefully, because God has taken you in his hands as if you were a diamond. An ordinary pebble is not worked on like that.

**236** Those who flee like cowards from suffering have something to meditate on when they see the enthusiasm with which other souls embrace pain.

There are many men and women who know how to suffer in a Christian way. Let us follow their example.

**237** You complain? And you tell me you have reason to complain: One pinprick after another!...

–But do you not realise that it is silly to be surprised at finding thorns among roses?

**238** Let me continue, as I have always done, to speak to you confidentially. For not to have the heart to talk about my own sufferings it is enough to have a Crucifix in front of me... And I don't mind adding that I have suffered a lot, though always cheerfully.

**239** Are you misunderstood? He was the Truth and the Light, but not even those close to him understood him. —As I have asked you so often before, remember Our Lord's words: "The disciple is not greater than his Master."

**240** For a son of God, contradictions and calumnies are what wounds received on the battlefield are for a soldier.

**241** They say this and that about you... But what does your good name matter?

In any case don't feel ashamed or sorry for yourself, but for them: for those who ill-treat you.

**242** Sometimes they didn't want to understand: it is as if they were blind... But

sometimes it has been you who did not manage to be understood properly. You must change that!

**243** It is not enough to be right. You have to know how to prove it and others should want to recognise the truth.

However, state the truth whenever necessary, without bothering about "what they will say".

**244** If you frequent the Master's school, you will not be surprised at also having to fight against the misunderstandings of so very many people who could help you a great deal if only they made the effort to be a bit more understanding.

**245** You have not ill-treated him physically... But you have ignored him so often; you have looked at him with indifference, as if he were a stranger.

—Isn't that harm enough!

**246** Without wanting to, persecutors sanctify... —But woe to these "sanctifiers"!

**247** On earth, one is very often rewarded with calumny.

**248** There are souls who seem bent on inventing sufferings, on torturing themselves with their imagination.

Afterwards, when objective sorrows and contradictions come their way, they do not know how to be like the Most Holy Virgin at the foot of the Cross with her eyes fixed on her Son.

**249** Sacrifice, sacrifice! It is true that to follow Jesus Christ is to carry the Cross – He has said so. But I don't like to hear souls who love Our Lord speak so much about crosses and renunciations, because where there is Love, it is a willing sacrifice – though it remains hard – and the cross is the Holy Cross.

–A soul which knows how to love and give itself in this way, is filled with peace and joy. Therefore, why insist on “sacrifice”, as if you were seeking consolation, if Christ's Cross – which is your life – makes you happy?

**250** We could get rid of so much neurosis and hysteria if people were taught – together with Christian doctrine – really to live as Christians: loving God and knowing how to accept things that annoy us as a blessing from His hand!

**251** Do not pass by a neighbour's affliction with indifference. That person – a relative, a friend, a colleague... someone you don't know – is your brother.

–Remember the Gospel story you have heard so often with sadness: not even the relatives of Jesus trusted Him. –Make sure the scene is not repeated.

**252** Imagine that on earth there was only God and you.

–Thus it will be easier to bear with mortifications and humiliations. And, in the end, you will do the things God wants and in the way He wants.

**253** That sick person, consumed by a zeal for souls, said: sometimes the body protests a little and complains, but I also try to transform “those moans” into smiles,

because then they become very effective.

**254** An incurable illness restricted his movements. And yet he cheerfully assured me: "The illness suits me well and I love it more all the time. If I were given the choice, I would be born again this way a hundred times!"

**255** Jesus came to the Cross, after having prepared himself for thirty three years, all his life!

—His disciples, if they really want to imitate him, have to convert their existence into a co-redemption of Love, with their own active and passive self-denial.

**256** The Cross is present in everything, and it comes when one least expects it. —But don't forget that, normally, the beginning of the Cross and the beginning of efficacy go together.

**257** The Lord, the Eternal Priest, always blesses with the Cross.

**258** *Cor Mariae perdolentis, miserere*

*nobis!* – Invoke the Heart of Holy Mary, with the purpose and determination of uniting yourself to her sorrow, in reparation for your sins and the sins of men of all times.

And pray to her – for every soul – that her sorrow may increase in us our aversion to sin, and that we may be able to love the physical or moral contradictions of each day as a means of expiation.



## HUMILITY

**259** *Prayer* is the humility of the man who acknowledges his profound wretchedness and the greatness of God. He addresses and adores God as one who expects everything from Him and nothing from himself.

*Faith* is the humility of the mind which renounces its own judgement and surrenders to the verdict and authority of the Church.

*Obedience* is the humility of the will which subjects itself to the will of another, for God's sake.

*Chastity* is the humility of the flesh, which subjects itself to the spirit.

Exterior *mortification* is the humility of the senses.



*Penance* is the humility of all the passions, immolated to the Lord.

—Humility is truth on the road of the ascetical struggle.

**260** It is a great thing to know oneself to be nothing before God, because that is how things are.

**261** “Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart... “The humility of Jesus!... What a lesson for you who are a poor earthenware vessel! He — always merciful — has raised you up, and made the light of the sun of grace shine upon your baseness, which has now been freely exalted. And you, how often you have covered your pride under a cloak of dignity or justice...! And how many chances to learn from the Master you have wasted by not knowing how to supernaturalize them!

**262** Those periods of depression, because you see your defects or because others discover them, have no foundation...

—Ask for true humility.

**263** Allow me to remind you that among other evident signs of a lack of humility are:

—Thinking that what you do or say is better than what others do or say;

—Always wanting to get your own way;

—Arguing when you are not right or — when you are — insisting stubbornly or with bad manners;

—Giving your opinion without being asked for it, when charity does not demand you to do so;

—Despising the point of view of others;

—Not being aware that all the gifts and qualities you have are on loan;

—Not acknowledging that you are unworthy of all honour or esteem, even the ground you are treading on or the things you own;

—Mentioning yourself as an example in conversation;

—Speaking badly about yourself, so that they may form a good opinion of you, or contradict you;

—Making excuses when rebuked;

—Hiding some humiliating faults

from your director, so that he may not lose the good opinion he has of you;

—Hearing praise with satisfaction, or being glad that others have spoken well of you;

—Being hurt that others are held in greater esteem than you;

—Refusing to carry out menial tasks;

—Seeking or wanting to be singled out;

—Letting drop words of self-praise in conversation, or words that might show your honesty, your wit or skill, your professional prestige...;

—Being ashamed of not having certain possessions...

**264** To be humble does not mean to feel anxiety or fear.

**265** Let us flee from the false humility whose real name is comfort-seeking.

**266** It is Peter who speaks: Lord! Do You wash my feet? Jesus answers: You do not understand what I am doing now; you will understand it later. Peter insists: You will never wash my feet. And Jesus

explains: If I do not wash your feet, you will have no part with me. Simon Peter surrenders: Lord, not only my feet, but also my hands and my head.

Faced by the call to total self-giving, complete and without any hesitation, we often oppose it with false modesty like Peter's... May we also be men with a heart like the Apostle's! Peter allows no one to love Jesus more than he does. That love leads us to reply thus: Here I am! Wash me, head, hands and feet! Purify me completely, for I want to give myself to You without holding anything back.

**267** I copy for you from a letter: "I am enchanted by evangelical humility. But what infuriates me is the timid, sheepish and irresponsible way by which some Christians discredit the Church. That atheist author must have had them in mind when he wrote that Christian morality is the morality of slaves." In fact we are servants: servants raised to the rank of children of God, who do not wish to behave as if enslaved by their passions.

**268** If you are convinced of your “poor quality” – if you know yourself – you will react to events supernaturally. Joy and peace will take a firmer root in your soul, in the face of humiliations, being despised, calumnies...

In these cases, after saying *fiat* – Lord, whatever you want – you should think: “Is that all he said? He obviously does not know me, otherwise he wouldn’t have left it at that.”

Being convinced that you deserve worse treatment, you will feel grateful to that person, and rejoice at what might have made somebody else suffer.

**269** The higher a statue is raised, the harder and more dangerous the impact when it falls.

**270** Go to spiritual direction with greater humility each time. And go punctually, for that is also humility.

See yourself – and you will not be mistaken, because God speaks to you there – as a very sincere little child who is being taught to speak, to read, to know the names

of flowers and birds, to experience joys and sorrows, to notice the ground he is treading on.

**271** “I am still a poor creature”, you tell me.

But once, when you realised it, you felt very bad about it! Now, without getting used to it or giving in to it, you are starting to make a habit of smiling, and of beginning your fight again with growing joy.

**272** If you are sensible and humble, you will have realised that one never stops learning... This happens in every field; even the wisest will always have something to learn, until the end of their lives; if they don't, they cease to be wise.

**273** Dear Jesus: if I have to be an apostle, you will need to make me very humble.

Everything the sun touches is bathed in light. Lord, fill me with your clarity, make me share in your divinity so that I may identify my will with your adorable Will and become the instrument you wish me to be. Give me the madness of the

humiliation you underwent, which led you to be born poor, to work in obscurity, to the shame of dying sewn with nails to a piece of wood, to your self-effacement in the Blessed Sacrament.

—May I know myself: may I know myself and know you. I will then never lose sight of my nothingness.

**274** Only the stupid are obstinate: the very stupid are very obstinate.

**275** Do not forget that in human affairs other people may also be right: they see the same question as you, but from a different point of view, under another light, with other shades, with other contours.

—Only in faith and morals is there an indisputable standard: that of our Mother the Church.

**276** How good it is to know how to put things right with yourself...! And, how few people learn that art!

**277** Rather than commit a fault against charity, give in, offer no resistance, when-



ever you have the chance. Show the humility of the grass, which yields without needing to know whose foot is stepping on it.

**278** To be converted you must climb via humility, along the path of self-abasement.

**279** You said: “the *self* has to be decapitated...” –But it’s hard, isn’t it?

**280** One often has to force oneself, to humble oneself and say repeatedly to the Lord in earnest, *Serviam!* – I will serve you.

**281** *Memento, homo, quia pulvis es...* – remember, man, that you are dust... If you are dust, why should you find it irksome to be trodden upon?

**282** ↙ The path of humility takes you everywhere... but above all to Heaven.

**283** A sure way to be humble is to contemplate how, even without talents, fame or fortune, we can be effective instruments if we go to the Holy Spirit so that He



may grant us his gifts.

The apostles, though they had been taught by Jesus for three years, fled in terror from the enemies of Christ. But after Pentecost they let themselves be flogged and imprisoned, and ended up giving their lives in witness to their faith.

**284** It is true that nobody can be certain of his perseverance... But that uncertainty is another reason for humility and an obvious proof of our freedom.

**285** Although you don't amount to much, God has made use of you, and He continues to make use of you to perform fruitful work again and again for his glory.

—Don't put on airs. Think what would an instrument of iron or steel say about itself, when a craftsman uses it to set golden jewellery with precious stones?

**286** What is of more value: a pound weight of gold or a pound of copper?... And yet in many cases copper is more useful and better than gold.

**287** Your vocation – God’s calling – is to direct, to draw others, to serve, to lead. If through a false or ill-conceived humility you isolate yourself, all huddled up in a corner, you are failing in your duty to be a divine instrument.

**288** When the Lord makes use of you to pour his grace into souls remember that you are only the wrapping round the gift, the paper that is torn up and thrown away.

**289** *Quia respexit humilitatem ancillae suae* – because he has looked graciously upon the lowliness of his handmaid...

–I am more convinced every day that authentic humility is the supernatural basis for all virtues!

Talk to Our Lady, so that she may train us to walk along that path.

## CITIZENSHIP

**290** The world awaits us. Yes! We love the world passionately because God has taught us to: *Sic Deus dilexit mundum...* – God so loved the world. And we love it because it is there that we fight our battles in a most beautiful war of charity, so that everyone may find the peace that Christ has come to establish.

**291** The Lord has shown us this refinement of Love: he has let us conquer the world for him.

He is always so humble that he has wished to limit himself to making it possible... To us He has granted the easiest and most agreeable part: taking action and gaining the victory.

**292** The world... "That is our field!" you said, after directing your eyes and thoughts to heaven, with all the assurance of the farmer who walks through his own ripe corn. *Regnare Christum volumus!* – we want Him to reign over this earth of his!

**293** "It is a time of hope, and I live off this treasure. It is not just a phrase, Father," you tell me, "it is a reality."

Well then... bring the whole world, all the human values which attract you so very strongly – friendship, the arts, science, philosophy, theology, sport, nature, culture, souls – bring all of this within that hope: the hope of Christ.

**294** That insubstantial and pleasure-giving enchantment of the world – so constant. The flowers by the wayside – you are attracted by their colour and the air is scented with them; the birds of the air; creatures, all of them...

–My poor son: it is quite reasonable. For, if you were not fascinated by it all, what sacrifice would you be able to offer Our Lord?

**295** Your Christian vocation requires you to be in God and, at the same time, to be concerned with the things of the earth, using them objectively, just as they are: to give them back to Him.

**296** It seems incredible that one could be so happy in this world, where so many are bent on leading sad lives because they follow their own selfishness, as if everything came to an end down here!

—Don't you be one of them... rectify your intention all the time!

**297** The world is cold and seems to be asleep. —You often look on it, from your vantage point, with a glance that would set it on fire. Lord, may it awaken!

—Channel your bursts of impatience and be sure that if we manage to keep our whole life alight, we shall set every corner of the world alight, and the way it all looks will change.

**298** The faithfulness — in the service of God and souls — which I always ask you for, is not the easy type of enthusiasm. It is

the enthusiasm you can acquire in the middle of the street, when you see how much there is to be done everywhere.

**299** A good son of God has to be very human. But not to such an extent that he becomes uncouth and bad-mannered.

**300** It is difficult to make our mark through quiet work and the proper fulfilment of our duties as citizens, so that later we can demand our rights and place them in the service of the Church and of society.

It is difficult... but it is very effective.

**301** It is not true that there is opposition between being a good Catholic and serving civil society faithfully. In the same way there is no reason why the Church and the State should clash when they proceed with the lawful exercise of their respective authorities, in fulfilment of the mission God has entrusted to them.

Those who affirm the contrary are liars, yes, liars! They are the same people who honour a false liberty, and ask us

Catholics “to do them the favour” of going back to the catacombs.

**302** Your task as a Christian citizen is to help see Christ’s love and freedom preside over all aspects of modern life: culture and the economy, work and rest, family life and social relations.

**303** A son of God cannot entertain class prejudice, for he is interested in the problems of all men. And he tries to help solve them with the justice and charity of Our Redeemer.

The Apostle already pointed it out when he wrote that the Lord is no respecter of persons. I have not hesitated to translate his words thus: there is only one race of men, the race of the children of God!

**304** Worldly men go out of their way to make souls lose God as soon as possible; and then, make them lose the world. They do not love this world of ours. They exploit it by trampling over others!

—I really do hope you too won’t fall victim to this double swindle!



**305** Some people feel embittered all the time. Everything makes them uneasy. They go to sleep with a physical obsession: that this sleep, the only possible escape, is not going to last very long. They wake up with the unwelcome and disheartening feeling that they now have another day in front of them.

Many have forgotten that the Lord has placed us in the world on our way to eternal happiness. They do not realise that only those who walk on earth with the joy of the children of God will be able to attain it.

**306** Through your behaviour as a Christian citizen, show people the difference between living sadly and living cheerfully; between being timid and being daring; between acting cautiously, with duplicity – *hypocritically* – and acting as men of simplicity and integrity. In a word, between being worldly and being children of God.

**307** A fundamental error against which you must be on guard is to think that the noble and just customs and needs of your times and environment cannot be directed



and accommodated to the holiness of the moral teaching of Jesus Christ.

Notice that I have specified that the customs and needs should be "noble and just". The other ones lack the right to be adopted by citizens.

**308** Religion cannot be separated from life, either in theory or in daily reality.

**309** Far away on the horizon heaven seems to meet the earth. Do not forget that where heaven and earth really meet is in your heart of a child of God.

**310** We cannot simply fold our arms when a subtle persecution condemns the Church to die of starvation, putting it outside the sphere of public life, and above all obstructing its part in education, culture and family life.

These are not our rights; they are God's rights. He has entrusted them to us Catholics so that we may exercise them!

**311** Many things, whether they be material, technical, economic, social, political or

cultural... when left to themselves, or left in the hands of those who lack the light of the faith, become formidable obstacles to the supernatural life. They form a sort of closed shop which is hostile to the Church.

You, as a Christian and, perhaps, as a research worker, writer, scientist, politician or labourer... have the duty to sanctify those things. Remember that the whole universe – as the Apostle says – is groaning as in the pangs of labour, awaiting the liberation of the children of God.

**312** You should not want to make the world into a cloister, because this would be a disorder. But don't convert the Church into some earthly faction either, because that would be tantamount to treason.

**313** How sad it is to have a Caesarist mentality, and not to understand the freedom other citizens enjoy in the things God has left to the free choice of men.

**314** "Who said that to reach sanctity, you need to seek refuge in a cell or on a solitary mountain?" That was what a good family

man asked himself in amazement, and he added: "If that were so, it would not be the people who would be holy, but the cell, or the mountain. It seems they have forgotten that Our Lord expressly told each and every one of us: be holy as my heavenly Father is holy."

—My only comment was: "Our Lord, besides wanting us to be saints, grants each one of us the relevant graces."

**315** Love your own country: it is a Christian virtue to be patriotic. But if patriotism becomes nationalism, which leads you to look at other people, at other countries, with indifference, with scorn, without Christian charity and justice, then it is a sin.

**316** It is not patriotism to justify crimes... or to deny the rights of other peoples.

**317** The Apostle also wrote that "there is no more Gentile and Jew, no more circumcised and uncircumcised; no one is barbarian or Scythian, no one is a slave or a free man; there is nothing but Christ in any of us."

Those words are as valid today as they were then. Before the Lord there is no

difference of nation, race, class, state... Each one of us has been born in Christ to be a new creature, a son of God. We are all brothers, and we have to behave fraternally towards one another!

**318** Many years ago now, I saw most clearly a truth which will always be valid: the whole web of society needs a new way of living and spreading the eternal truths of the Gospel, since it has departed from Christian faith and morals. Children of God at the very heart of that society, of the world, have to let their virtues shine out like lamps in the darkness – *quasi lucernae lucentes in caliginoso loco*.

**319** The perennial vitality of the Catholic Church ensures that the truth and spirit of Christ do not become remote from the different needs of the times.

**320** To follow in Christ's footsteps, today's apostle does not need to reform anything, but even less has he to take no part in the contemporary affairs going on around him. –He has only to act as the first

Christians did, and give life to his environment.

**321** You live in the middle of the world and you are just another citizen living in contact with men who say they are good or bad. You must always want to give other people the happiness you enjoy as a Christian.

**322** A decree went out from the Emperor Augustus, enjoining that all the inhabitants of Israel should be registered. Mary and Joseph made their way to Bethlehem. —Has it ever occurred to you that the Lord made use of the exact acceptance of a law to fulfil his prophecy?

Love and respect the norms of behaviour required for living in amity. Have no doubt, either, that your loyal submission to duty can be the means for others to discover Christian integrity, which is the fruit of divine love, and to find God.

## SINCERITY

**323** Anyone who hides a temptation from his director shares a secret with the devil. —He has become a friend of the enemy.

**324** The dust thrown up by your fall blinds and disorients you, and you have thoughts which rob you of your peace.

—Have you sought relief in tears by the side of Our Lord, and in confident conversation with a brother?

**325** Sincerity: with God, with the director, with your fellow men. —If you act like that, I shall be certain of your perseverance.

**326** Do you want to know how to be frank and simple? Listen to these words of

Peter and meditate on them: *Domine, Tu omnia nosti...* –Lord, You know all things!

**327** “What shall I say?”, you asked when you began to open up your soul. And with a sure conscience, I answered: “In the first place say what you would not like to be known.”

**328** The defects you see in others are perhaps your own. *Si oculus tuus fuerit simplex...* – If your eye is clear, the whole of the body will be lit up; whereas if the eye is diseased, the whole of the body will be in darkness.

Moreover: “How is it that you can see the speck of dust in your brother’s eye, and are not aware of the beam that is in your own?”

Examine your conscience.

**329** We all need to foresee our lack of objectivity whenever we have to judge our own behaviour. This applies to you too.

**330** I agree, you are saying *nearly* all the truth... Therefore you are not truthful.



**331** You complain..., and I go on with holy intransigence: you complain... because this time I have put my finger where it hurts.

**332** You understood what sincerity is when you wrote to me: "I am trying to form the habit of calling things by their proper names and, above all, of not looking for words for what does not exist."

**333** Think about this carefully: being transparent lies more in not hiding things rather than in wanting things to be seen. It is a matter of allowing the objects lying at the bottom of a glass to be perceived, and not trying to make the air visible.

**334** Let us always act in the presence of God in such a way that we never have to hide anything from men.

**335** Your worries are at an end... You have discovered that being sincere with the director sorts out all complications with admirable ease.



**336** How mistaken parents, teachers, directors... can be, when they demand absolute sincerity and then, when they are told the whole truth, are frightened!

**337** You were reading in that dictionary the synonyms for insincere: "two-faced, surreptitious, evasive, disingenuous, sly". –As you closed the book, you asked the Lord that nobody should ever be able to apply those adjectives to you, and you resolved to improve much more in this supernatural and human virtue of sincerity.

**338** *Abyssus, abyssum invocat...* – deep is calling on deep, as I have already reminded you. It is the exact description of how liars, hypocrites, renegades, and traitors behave. As they are disgusted with their own behaviour, they hide their misdeeds from others and go from bad to worse, creating an abyss between themselves and their neighbour.

**339** The liturgy rejoices with the song: *Tota pulchra es Maria, et macula originalis non est in te!* – You are all fair,

O Mary, without original sin! In Her there is not the slightest shadow of duplicity. I pray daily to our Mother that we may be able to open our souls in spiritual direction and the light of grace may shine in all our behaviour!

Mary will obtain for us the courage to be sincere, if we ask her for it, so that we may come closer to the Most Blessed Trinity.

## LOYALTY

**340** A consequence of loyalty is your assurance that you are walking along the right road, without being unsettled or confused. You are also strengthened in this additional certainty: that good sense and happiness exist.

—See whether this is fulfilled in every instant of your life.

**341** You told me that God sometimes fills you with light for a while and sometimes does not.

I reminded you, firmly, that the Lord is always infinitely good. That is why those bright days are enough to help you carry on; but the times when you see no light are good for you too, and make you more faithful.

**342** The salt of the earth. Our Lord said that his disciples – you and I also – are the salt of the earth: to render immune to infection, to prevent corruption, to season the world.

But he also added: *Quod si sal evanuerit...* – if the salt itself becomes tasteless, it will be cast out and trampled underfoot by men.

–On seeing the many things happening which we lament, are you now beginning to find an explanation for what you could not explain before?

**343** That passage of the Second Epistle to Timothy makes me shudder, when the Apostle laments that Demas has deserted him for love of this life and gone to Thessalonica. For a trifle, and for fear of persecution, this man, whom Saint Paul had quoted in other epistles as being among the saints, had betrayed the divine enterprise.

I shudder when I realise how little I am: and it leads me to demand from myself faithfulness to the Lord even in events that might seem to be indifferent – for if they do not help me to be more united to Him, I

do not want them!

**344** I thought the comment on loyalty you had written to me was very appropriate to all those moments in history which the devil makes his business to repeat: "I carry with me every day in my heart, in my mind and on my lips, an aspiration: *Rome*."

**345** What a great discovery! Something you barely half-understood turned out to be very clear when you had to explain it to others.

You had to speak very gently with someone, who was disheartened because he felt useless and did not want to be a burden to anyone... You understood then, better than ever, why I always talk to you about being little donkeys turning the water-wheel: carrying on faithfully, with large blinkers which prevent us personally seeing or tasting the results – the flowers, the fruit, the freshness of the garden – confident about the effectiveness of our fidelity.

**346** Loyalty demands a real hunger for formation, because you are moved by a sincere

love and you do not wish to run the risk of spreading or of defending, through ignorance, principles or attitudes which are very far from being in accordance with the truth.

**347** "I would like", you write, "my loyalty and perseverance to be so solid and so eternal, and my service so vigilant and loving, that you could be pleased with me, and I could provide a bit of solace for you."

—And I answer: may God confirm you in your resolution, so that we may provide help and solace for Him.

**348** It is true that some who become enthusiastic leave later on. Don't worry: they are the needle God makes use of to draw the thread through the cloth.

—Oh, and *pray for them*, because perhaps one can manage to get them to keep giving an impulse to others.

**349** For you who are wavering, I copy from a letter: "From now on I may continue to be the same inept instrument as ever. But in spite of that, I have changed my way of defining and solving the

problem of my life, because there is in me a firm desire to persevere... for ever!"

—You must never doubt that He never fails.

**350** Your life is service, but always with stalwart loyalty, laying down no conditions. Only thus shall we be able to give the Lord what he expects.

**351** I shall never share the idea, either in the ascetical or the juridical field, of those who think and live as if serving the Church were equivalent to climbing to the top.

**352** It hurts you to see that some use the technique of speaking about the Cross of Christ, only so as to climb and obtain positions. They are the same people who consider nothing they see as clean if it does not coincide with their own particular standards.

—All the more reason, then, for you to persevere in the rectitude of your intentions, and to ask the Master to grant you the strength to repeat: *Non mea voluntas, sed tua fiat!* — Lord, may I fulfil your Holy Will with love!



**353** Every day you must grow in loyalty towards the Church, the Pope and the Holy See... with a love that should be always *more theological*.

**354** You have a great desire truly to love the Church: and all the greater, when you see that those who wish to make her appear ugly are more active. —This seems very natural to me: because the Church is your Mother.

**355** Sooner or later, those who do not wish to understand that the faith demands service to the Church and to souls, invert the terms, and end up by having the Church and souls serving their own personal ends.

**356** May you never fall into the error of identifying the Mystical Body of Christ with a particular personal or public attitude of any of its members.

And may you never let other people with less formation fall into that error.

—Now you realise the importance of your integrity, of your loyalty!



**357** I cannot understand you when you talk about matters of morals and of faith and you tell me that you are an independent Catholic...

—From whom are you independent? That false independence is equivalent to leaving the way of Christ.

**358** You must never give in with regard to the doctrine of the Church.

—When an alloy is made, the better metal loses its value.

Furthermore, that treasure is not yours, and — as the Gospel says — the Owner may ask you to render an account when you least expect it.

**359** I have to agree with you that there are practising Catholics who even seem devout in the eyes of others and are perhaps sincerely convinced, yet are naively serving the enemies of the Church.

—Into their very homes, under various names, invariably wrongly used — ecumenism, pluralism, democracy — has insinuated itself the worst adversary — ignorance.

**360** Although it seems a paradox, those who call themselves sons of the Church may often be precisely those who sow greater confusion.

**361** You are tired of fighting. You are disgusted with an environment characterised by lack of loyalty. Everyone rushes upon the man who has fallen, to trample on him!

I do not know why you are surprised. The same thing happened to Christ himself, but He did not pull back, because He had come precisely to save the sick and those who did not understand him.

**362** That those who are loyal should remain inactive!, is what the disloyal want.

**363** Flee from sectarianism, which is opposed to loyal collaboration.

**364** True unity cannot be promoted by making new divisions... Even less can it come about when its promoters wish to gain control and take over from lawful authority.

**365** You became very thoughtful when

you heard me say: I want the blood of my Mother the Church to run in my veins; not Alexander's, or Charlemagne's, nor that of the Seven Sages of Greece.

**366** To persevere is to persist in love, *per Ipsum et cum Ipso et in Ipso*... Indeed we can also interpret this as: *He himself*, with me, for me and in me.

**367** Among Catholics it might perhaps be that some have little Christian spirit; or so it might seem to those who have dealings with them at some particular moment.

But if you were to be scandalised by this fact, you would show that you knew very little about human wretchedness and... about your own wretchedness. Furthermore, it is neither just nor loyal to use the example of the weaknesses of a few to speak ill of Christ and his Church.

**368** It is true that we, the children of God, ought not to serve the Lord to be noticed... But we should not mind being seen, much less should we cease to fulfil our duty because we are seen!

**369** Twenty centuries have gone by, and every day the scene is repeated: they continue to judge, to scourge and crucify the Master... And many Catholics, with their behaviour and with their words, continue to shout: Him? I don't know him!

I would like to go around everywhere, reminding many, confidentially, that God is merciful, but He is also very just! That is why He declared: "I too will disown whoever disowns me before men."

**370** I have always thought that lack of loyalty out of human respect is lack of love – and a lack of personality.

**371** Turn your eyes towards the Blessed Virgin and see how she practises the virtue of loyalty. When Elizabeth needs her, the Gospel says that she went *cum festinatione* – joyfully making haste. Learn from her!

## DISCIPLINE

**372** Obey with docility. –But intelligently too, with love and a sense of responsibility which has nothing to do with judging those who govern and direct you.

**373** In the apostolate, obey without paying attention to the human qualities of whoever it is asks you to do something, or to the way he asks you. Otherwise it is no virtue at all.

There are many kinds of crosses: some have diamonds or pearls or emeralds on them, some are enamelled or made of ivory... But some are made of wood like Our Lord's. All deserve the same veneration, for the Cross tells us about the sacrifice of God made Man. –Apply this

consideration to your obedience, without forgetting that He embraced the Wood of the Cross lovingly, without hesitation! There he obtained our Redemption.

Only after obeying, which is a sign of rectitude of intention, may you make fraternal correction with the required conditions, and reinforce unity by fulfilling the duty in question.

**374** We obey with our lips, our heart and our mind. –It is not a man who is being obeyed, but God.

**375** You do not love obedience if you do not really love the command, if you do not really love what you have been asked to do.

**376** Some pressing difficulties can be remedied immediately. Others, not so quickly. But they all are solved if we are faithful: if we obey, if we observe what has been laid down.

**377** The Lord wants a definite apostolate from you, such as catching those one hundred and fifty-three big fish – not others

— taken on the right-hand side of the boat.

And you ask me: How is it I know myself to be a fisher of men, can live in contact with many companions, and be able to distinguish to whom I should direct my specific apostolate, but still catch nobody? Is it Love that is lacking? Do I lack interior life?

Listen to the answer from Peter's lips, on the occasion of that other miraculous draught: —“Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.”

In the name of Jesus Christ, begin again. —And being strengthened, rid yourself of that indolence!

**378** Obey without so much useless brooding... Showing sadness or reluctance when asked to do something is a very considerable fault. But just to feel like this is not only no fault, but can in fact be the opportunity for a great victory, for crowning an act of heroic virtue.

I have not invented this. Remember the Gospel tells us that a father asked his two sons to do the same job. And Jesus



rejoices in the one who, despite raising difficulties, does it! He rejoices because discipline is the fruit of Love.

**379** Most acts of disobedience come from not knowing how to *listen* to what it is you are being asked to do, which in the end shows a lack of humility or of interest in serving.

**380** Do you want to obey fully? Well then, listen carefully so that you may understand the extent and the spirit of what is being pointed out to you; and if you do not understand something, ask.

**381** When will you be convinced that you have to obey? And you disobey if, instead of fulfilling your plan of life, you waste your time. You have to fill every minute, with work, study, proselytism, interior life.

**382** The Church, through care of the liturgy, makes us intuitively aware of the beauty of the mysteries of Religion and leads us to love them better. In a similar



way, without being theatrical, we should behave with a politeness – which may even seem worldly – of deep respect – external as well – towards our director, through whose lips the Will of God is made known to us.

**383** In governing, after considering the common good, one must realise that both in spiritual and in civil affairs it will be very rare for a law to displease nobody.

–There is a popular saying: The rain never pleases everybody! Yet you can be sure, that is not a defect of the law, but an unjustified rebelliousness of pride and selfishness by a few.

**384** Order, authority, discipline... They listen, if they do at all, with cynical smiles, claiming that they – both men and women – are defending their freedom.

They are the very people who later pretend that we should respect their erring ways or adapt to them; with their scurrilous protests, they do not understand that their behaviour is not – *it cannot be* – accepted by the authentic freedom of the rest.

**385** Those who direct spiritual tasks have to be concerned with all things human, so as to raise them to the supernatural order and make them godlike.

If they cannot be made godlike, do not be deceived: such “human” things are not human, they are “brutish”, inappropriate for a rational creature.

**386** Authority. This does not consist in the one above *yelling* at the one below, and he in turn to the one further down.

In such a way of behaving – a caricature of authority – apart from an evident lack of charity and of decent human standards, all that is achieved is that the one at the top becomes isolated from those who are governed, because he does not serve them. Rather it could be said that he uses them!

**387** Don’t be one of those who let their own homes be badly managed but attempt to meddle in the management of other people’s.

**388** But... do you really think you know it all just because you have been placed in authority?

—Listen carefully: the good ruler *knows* that he can, that he *should*, learn from others.

**389** Freedom of conscience: no! How many evils this lamentable error, which permits actions against the dictates that lie deepest in oneself, has brought about in nations and individuals.

Freedom “of consciences”, yes: for it means the duty to follow that interior command... ah, but after receiving a serious formation!

**390** To govern is not to mortify others.

**391** Occupying as you do a post of government, would you meditate on this: the strongest and most effective instruments, if they are not properly used, become dented, worn out and useless.

**392** Decisions of governance taken lightly or by someone on his own are always, or nearly always, influenced by a one-sided view of the problems.

—However good your training or

talents might be, you must listen to those who share with you that task of direction.

**393** Never listen to anonymous accusations: it is the way villains behave.

**394** A principle of good governance: take human material as it is and help it to improve while never despising it.

**395** I think it is very good that you should try daily to increase the depth of your concern for those under you. For to feel surrounded and protected by the affectionate understanding of the one in charge, can be the effective help which is needed by the people you have to serve by means of your governance.

**396** How sad it is to see some people in positions of authority speaking and making judgements lightly, without studying the matter in hand. They make hard statements about persons or matters they know nothing about, even permitting certain *prejudices* which are the result of disloyalty!

**397** If authority becomes dictatorial authoritarianism, and this situation is extended in time, historical continuity is lost. Those who govern die or become old. People without experience in government become mature in age, and the inexperienced and excitable young want to grab hold of the reins. How many evils and how many offences against God – their own and those of others – are to be blamed on the ones who abuse authority so badly!

**398** When he who commands is negative and distrustful, he will easily become tyrannical.

**399** Try to be properly objective in your work of governance. Avoid the inclination common to those who tend to see rather – and sometimes only – what is not going well, the mistakes.

–Be filled with joy and be assured that the Lord has granted to all the capacity to become holy precisely by fighting against their own defects.

**400** Eagerness for novelty can lead to mismanagement.

—You say we need a new set of rules... But do you think the human body would be better with a different system of nerves and arteries?

**401** How determined some are to turn people into a mass! They turn unity into amorphous uniformity and drown freedom.

They seem to know nothing of the remarkable unity of the human body, which presents such a God-given variety in its members. Each one has its own function, yet contributes to the general health of the whole.

—God does not want us all to be the same or to walk alike along exactly the same road.

**402** People have to be taught how to work, but their training need not be overdone, for actually doing things is a way of learning too. They should accept in advance their unavoidable shortcomings: the best is the enemy of the good.

**403** Never put your trust in organisation alone.

**404** The good shepherd does not need to fill the sheep with fear. Such behaviour befits bad rulers, and no one is very much surprised if they end up hated and alone.

**405** Governing often consists in knowing how to *draw good* out of people, with patience and affection.

**406** Good governance knows how to be flexible when necessary, without falling into the mistake of not asking enough of people.

**407** “As long as they don’t make me sin!” said that poor man bravely when he had been almost ruined, in his private life and in his earthly and Christian ambitions, by powerful enemies.

—Meditate on this and learn to say:  
“As long as they don’t make me sin!”

**408** Not all citizens form part of the regular army. But in time of war everybody



plays a part. And Our Lord said: "I have not come to bring peace, but war."

**409** "I was a guerrilla fighter," he wrote, "and I moved around the hills, shooting whenever I wanted. But I thought I had better become a soldier, because I realised that wars are won more easily by organised armies and well-disciplined armies. A poor guerrilla fighter on his own cannot take whole cities, or conquer the world. I hung up my old musket — it was so out of date! — and now I am better armed. At the same time, I know that I can no longer lie down in the hills, under the shade of a tree, and dream about winning the war all on my own."

—Blessed be the discipline and blessed be the unity of our Holy Mother the Church!

**410** I would say to many rebel Catholics that they fail in their duty if, instead of accepting the discipline and obedience due to lawful authority, they become a party, a small faction, worms of dissension, conspirators and gossips, promoters of stupid



personal squabbles, weavers of a mesh of petty envies and difficulties.

**411** A gentle wind is not the same as a hurricane. Anyone can resist the first: it is child's play, a parody of struggle.

—Gladly you bore small contradictions, shortages and little urgent problems. And you enjoyed the interior peace of thinking: now I am really working for God, because here we have the Cross!...

But now, my poor son, the hurricane has come, and you feel you are being shaken by a force that could uproot century-old trees. You feel this from without and within. But you must remain *confident*, for your Faith and your Love cannot be uprooted, nor can you be blown from your way... if you remain with the "head", if you maintain unity.

**412** How easily you leave the plan of life unfulfilled, or do things so badly that it is worse than not doing them at all. —Is that the way you mean to fall in love more each day with your way, and to pass on this love later to others?

**413** Aspire to have no more than one right: that of fulfilling your duty.

**414** Is the burden heavy? No, a thousand times no! Those obligations which you freely accepted are wings that raise you high above the vile mud of your passions.

Do the birds feel the weight of their wings? If you were to cut them off and put them on the scales you would see that *they are heavy*. But can a bird fly if they are taken away from it? It needs those wings and it does not notice their weight, for they lift it up above other creatures.

—Your “wings” are heavy too! But if you did not have them you would fall into the filthiest mire.

**415** “Mary kept all these things in her heart.”

Discipline does not seem at all heavy when it goes together with a clean and sincere love. Even if it costs you a lot, it unites you to the Loved One.

## PERSONALITY

**416** The Lord needs strong and courageous souls who refuse to come to terms with mediocrity and enter all kinds of environments with a sure step.

**417** A calm and balanced character, an inflexible will, deep faith and an ardent piety: these are the indispensable characteristics of a son of God.

**418** The Lord can raise children of Abraham from the very stones... But we must make sure that the stone is not crumbly, for though hard rock may be shapeless, it is easier to hew good stone for building from it.

**419** An apostle must not remain at the level of the mediocre. God calls him to be fully human in his actions, and at the same time to reflect the freshness of eternal things. – That is why the apostle has to be a soul who has undergone a long, patient and heroic process of formation.

**420** You say that you are discovering new things in yourself every day... I answer: you are now beginning to know yourself.

When you really love... you find new ways of loving even more.

**421** It would be a very sad thing if anyone looking at the way Catholics in society behave, concluded that they were sheepish and easily imposed upon.

Never forget that our Master was – indeed is! – *perfectus Homo*, perfect Man.

**422** If the Lord has given you some natural quality or skill, you should not just enjoy it yourself or show off about it; you should use it charitably in the service of your neighbour.

– And what better occasion than now

will you find to serve, since you live with so many souls who share the same ideal as yourself?

**423** Under the pressure and impact of a materialistic, pleasure-loving, faithless world, how can we demand and justify the freedom of not thinking as *they* do, and of not acting as *they* do?

—A son of God has no need to ask for that freedom, because Christ won it for us once and for all. But he does need to defend it and practise it whatever the circumstance he finds himself in. Only thus will *they* understand that our freedom is not bound up in our surroundings.

**424** Your relatives, colleagues and friends are beginning to notice the change, and realise that it is not a temporary phase, but that you are no longer the same.

—Don't worry, carry on! *Vivit vero in me Christus* — it is now Christ that lives in me — that's what is happening.

**425** You should respect those who are capable of saying *No* to you. And you

should also ask them to give you reasons for their refusal, so that you can learn... or put them right.

**426** Once you were pessimistic, hesitant and apathetic. Now you are completely transformed: you feel courageous, optimistic and self-confident, because you have made up your mind, at last, to rely on God alone.

**427** What a sorry state someone is in when he has marvellous human virtues but a total lack of supernatural outlook, because he will apply those virtues quite easily to his own selfish ends. —Meditate on this.

**428** Since you want to acquire a Catholic or universal mentality, here are some characteristics you should aim at:

—a breadth of vision and a vigorous endeavour to study more deeply the things that are permanently alive and unchanged in Catholic orthodoxy;

—a proper and healthy desire, which should never be frivolous, to present anew the standard teachings of traditional thought

in philosophy and the interpretation of history...;

—a careful attention to trends in science and contemporary thought;

—and a positive and open attitude towards the current changes in society and in ways of living.

**429** You have to learn to disagree charitably with others — whenever the need arises — without becoming unpleasant.

**430** With the grace of God and a solid formation you can make yourself understood in a backward environment. There, they would find it difficult to follow you if you lacked “the gift of tongues”, the capacity to try and reach their understanding.

**431** You should always be well-mannered towards everybody, especially towards those who present themselves as your adversaries (you should never have enemies) when you are trying to let them see their mistake.

**432** You feel sorry for a spoilt child,



don't you? Well then, don't look after yourself so well. Can't you see that you are going to get soft?

Moreover, you must know that the flowers with the sweetest scent are the wild flowers that have grown out in the open, through rain and drought.

**433** He will go very far, they say. It is frightening to think of his future responsibility. He has never been known to work unselfishly or to say a timely word or to write anything fruitful. His life is entirely negative. He always gives the impression of being submerged in deep thought, although it is well known that he never cultivated any ideas worth thinking about. His face and manner have the gravity of a mule, and so he has the reputation of being prudent.

—He will go very far! But, I ask myself, what will he be able to teach others? How and in what will he serve them if we do not help him to change?

**434** The pedant interprets the simplicity and humility of the learned as ignorance.



**435** Don't be one of those people who, when they receive an order, immediately begin to think about how to change it... —We might say they have too much “personality”, and they cause disunity or ruin.

**436** Experience, great knowledge of the world, being able to read between the lines, an exaggerated sharpness, a critical spirit... All those things, in your business and social relations, have led you too far, to such an extent that you have become a bit cynical. All that “excessive realism”, which is a lack of supernatural spirit, has even invaded your interior life. —Through failing to be simple, you have become at times cold and unfeeling.

**437** At heart you are a good chap, but you fancy yourself as a Machiavelli. —Remember that to enter into Heaven you have to be a good and honest man, not a tiresome little intriguer.

**438** That good humour of yours is admirable... But to take absolutely everything as a joke is, you must admit,

going too far. –The real position is quite different. Since you do not have the will to take your own affairs seriously, you justify yourself by poking fun at others who are better than you.

**439** I do not deny that you are clever. But your unreasonable vehemence leads you to act like a fool.

**440** Your character is so uneven! –Your keyboard is out of order. You play very well on the high notes and on the low notes... but no sound comes from the ones in the middle, the ones used in ordinary life, the ones people normally hear.

**441** Take note of this. I told a certain noble, learned and dauntless man, on a memorable occasion, that by defending a holy cause, which “good people” were attacking, a high post in his field was at stake: he was going to lose it. –With a voice full of human and supernatural seriousness, despising the honours of this earth, he answered: “It is my soul that is at stake.”

**442** Diamonds are polished with diamonds..., and souls with souls.

**443** “A great sign appeared in Heaven: a woman adorned with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and a crown of twelve stars about her head.” –From this, you and I and everyone may be sure that nothing perfects our personality so much as correspondence with grace.

–Try to imitate the Virgin Mary and you will be a complete man or woman.

## PRAYER

**444** Conscious of our duties, can we let a whole day go past without remembering we have a soul?

In our daily meditation, we have always to put things right so as not to depart from the way.

**445** If you abandon prayer you may at first live on spiritual reserves... and after that, by cheating.

**446** Practise meditation for a fixed period and at a fixed time.

—Otherwise we would be putting our own convenience first; that would be a lack of mortification. And prayer without mortification is not at all effective.

**447** You lack interior life: that is because you do not consider in your prayer other people's concerns and proselytism; because you do not make an effort to see things clearly, to make definite resolutions and fulfil them; because you do not have a supernatural outlook in your study, in your work, in your conversations, and your dealings with others...

—Are you living in the presence of God? For that is a consequence and a manifestation of your prayer.

**448** You haven't been praying? Why, because you haven't had time?

—But you do have time. Furthermore, what sort of works will you be able to do if you have not meditated on them in the presence of the Lord, so as to put them in order? Without that conversation with God, how can you finish your daily work with perfection? —Look, it is as if you claimed you had no time to study because you were too busy giving lessons... Without study you cannot teach well.

Prayer has to come before everything. If you understand this and do not put it into

practice, don't tell me that you have no time: it's simply that you do not want to pray!

**449** Prayer, more prayer! —It may seem odd to say that now when you are taking examinations and working harder... But you need prayer, and not only the habitual prayer as an exercise of devotion; you also need to pray during odd moments, to pray between times, instead of allowing your mind to wander on silly things.

It does not matter if, in spite of your effort, you do not manage to concentrate and be recollected. That meditation may be of greater value than the one you made, with all ease, in the oratory.

**450** Here is an effective custom for achieving presence of God: your first audience every day should be with Jesus Christ.

**451** Prayer is not the prerogative of monks; it is a Christian undertaking of men and women of the world who know themselves to be children of God.

**452** Certainly, you have to follow your

way: a man of action... with a contemplative vocation.

**453** A Catholic, without prayer? It is the same as a soldier without arms.

**454** Thank the Lord for the enormous gift he has granted you by making you understand that "only one thing is necessary." And, along with that thanksgiving, may no day go past without your offering a prayer of petition for those who don't know him yet or have not understood him.

**455** When they were *fishing* for you, you would ask yourself where they got that strength and fire which burned everything in sight. -Now as you pray you realise that this is the source that wells up within the true children of God.

**456** You *belittle* meditation... Might you not be afraid, and so seek anonymity since you dare not speak with Christ face to face?

-You must see that there are many ways of *belittling* meditation, even though you might say you are practising it.

**457** Prayer is a time for holy intimacies and firm resolutions.

**458** How much sense there was in the plea of a soul who said: Lord, don't abandon me; can't you see that there is "another person" who is tugging at my feet?

**459** Will the Lord return and enkindle my soul? Your head assures you that He will come and so, deep down, does a faint sense of longing which is perhaps hope. On the other hand, your heart and will (too much of the former and too little of the latter) cast a paralysing and deadly melancholy over everything, like a sneer of bitter mockery.

Listen to the promise of the Holy Spirit: "Within a very short time, He who has to come will come and will not delay. In the meantime, the just man lives by faith."

**460** True prayer which absorbs the whole individual benefits not so much from the solitude of the desert as from interior recollection.



**461** We prayed that evening right out in the country as night was falling. We must have looked rather peculiar to anyone who saw us and did not know what we were up to: sitting on the ground in silence, which was interrupted only by the reading of some points for meditation.

That prayer under the open sky, *hammering away* for everyone there with us, for the Church, for souls, was fruitful and pleasing to Heaven. Any place is fitting for that meeting with God.

**462** I am glad that in your prayer you tend to go far: you contemplate lands different from the one in which you find yourself; before your eyes pass people of other races; you hear different tongues... It is like an echo of that commandment of Jesus, *Euntes docete omnes gentes* – go, teach all nations.

To go ever further, you must enkindle that fire among those around you. Your dreams and ambitions will become reality: sooner, more and better!

**463** Your prayer will sometimes be

discursive; maybe less often, full of fervour; and, perhaps often, dry, dry, dry. But what matters is that you, with God's help, are not disheartened.

Consider the sentry on duty. He does not know if the King or the Head of State is in the palace: he is not told what he might be doing, and generally the public figure does not know who is on guard.

It is not at all like that with our God. He lives where you live, He cares for you and knows your inmost thoughts. Do not abandon the guard-duty of your prayer!

**464** Look at the set of senseless reasons the enemy gives you for abandoning your prayer. "I have no time" – when you are continually wasting it. "This is not for me." "My heart is dry..."

Prayer is not a question of what you say or feel, but of love. And you love when you try hard to say something to the Lord, even though you might not actually say anything.

**465** "Just one minute of intense prayer is enough." Someone who never prayed used

to say that.

—Would someone in love think it enough to contemplate intensely the person they love for just a minute?

**466** This ideal of warring — and winning — Christ's battles will only become a reality through prayer and sacrifice, through Faith and Love. Well, then... pray and believe, and suffer, and Love!

**467** Mortification is the drawbridge that enables us to enter the castle of prayer.

**468** Do not be discouraged. However unworthy the person is, however imperfect the prayer turns out to be, if it is offered with humility and perseverance, God always hears it.

**469** Lord, I do not deserve to be heard, because I am wicked, a penitent soul prayed: But he added: Yet... listen to me *quoniam bonus* — because You are good.

**470** Our Lord sent out his disciples to preach, and when they came back he

gathered them together and invited them to go with him to a desert place where they could rest... What marvellous things Jesus would ask them and tell them! Well, the Gospel is always relevant to the present day.

**471** I understand perfectly when you write to me about your apostolate: "I am going to pray for three hours, studying Physics. It will be a bombardment so that another position, which is on the other side of the library table, *falls* – you have met him already when he came round here."

I remember how happy you were when you heard me say that prayer and work can easily go together.

**472** The Communion of Saints: that young engineer understood it well when he told me: "Father, on such a day, at such a time, you were praying for me."

This is and will always be the first and most fundamental help that we can provide for souls: prayer.

**473** Acquire the habit of saying vocal

prayers in the morning, while you are dressing, like little children. You will have greater presence of God later during the day.

**474** The Rosary is most effective for those who use their intelligence and their study as a weapon. Because that apparently monotonous way of beseeching Our Lady as children do their Mother, can destroy every seed of vainglory and pride.

**475** "Immaculate Virgin, I know well that I am only a miserable wretch, and all I do is increase each day the number of my sins..." You told me the other day that was how you spoke to Our Mother.

And I was confident in advising you with assurance to say the Holy Rosary. Blessed be that monotony of Hail Marys which purifies the monotony of your sins!

**476** A sad way of not praying the Rosary is to leave it for the end of the day.

If you say it when going to bed, it will be done at best badly and with no meditation on the mysteries. It will be difficult then to avoid routine, which is

what drowns true piety, the only piety worth the name.

**477** The Rosary is said not with the lips alone, muttering Hail Marys one after the other. That is the way over-pious old men and women rattle them off. —For a Christian, vocal prayer must spring from the heart, so that while the Rosary is said, the mind can enter into contemplation of each one of the mysteries.

**478** You always leave the Rosary for later, and you end up not saying it at all because you are sleepy. —If there is no other time, say it in the street without letting anybody notice it. It will, moreover, help you to have presence of God.

**479** “Pray for me,” I said as I always do. And he answered in amazement: “But is something the matter?”

I had to explain that something is the matter or happens to us all the time; and I added that when prayer is lacking, “more and more weighty things are the matter.”

**480** Renew your acts of contrition during the day. You must realise that Jesus is being offended constantly, and unfortunately, these offences are not being atoned for at the same rate.

That is why I have so often said: "Acts of contrition, the more the better!" Echo my words with your life and your advice.

**481** How lovable is the scene of the Annunciation. How often we have meditated on this! Mary is recollected in prayer. She is using all her senses and her faculties to speak to God. It is in prayer that she comes to know the divine Will. And with prayer she makes it the life of her life. Do not forget the example of the Virgin Mary.



## WORK

**482** Work is man's original vocation. It is a blessing from God, and those who consider it a punishment are sadly mistaken.

The Lord, who is the best of fathers, placed the first man in Paradise *ut operaretur*, so that he would work.

**483** To study, to work: these are inescapable duties for all Christians. They are means of defending ourselves from the enemies of the Church and of attracting, with our professional prestige, so many souls who, being good, fight in isolation. They are most fundamental weapons for whoever wants to be an apostle in the middle of the world.



**484** I ask God that you may take as your model Jesus as an adolescent and as a young man, both when he disputed with the doctors in the Temple and when he worked in Joseph's workshop.

**485** Jesus' thirty-three years!...: thirty were spent in silence and obscurity; in submission and work...

**486** That big young man wrote to me saying: "My ideal is so great that only the sea could contain it." I answered: "And what about the Tabernacle, which is so 'small'; and the 'common' workshop of Nazareth?"

—It is in the greatness of ordinary things that He awaits us!

**487** Before God, no occupation is in itself great or small. Everything gains the value of the Love with which it is done.

**488** Heroism at work is to be found in *finishing* each task.

**489** Let me stress this point: it is in the

simplicity of your ordinary work, in the monotonous details of each day, that you have to find the secret, which is hidden from so many, of something great and new: Love.

**490** You say it helps you a lot to wonder how many businessmen have become saints since the time of the early Christians.

And you want to show that it is also possible today... —The Lord will not abandon you in that effort.

**491** You too have a professional vocation which *spurs* you on. Well, that *spur* is the hook to fish for men.

Rectify your intention, then, and be sure you acquire all the professional prestige you can for the service of God and of souls. The Lord counts on *this* too.

**492** To finish things you have to start them.

—It seems a truism. But you so often lack that simple decision! And... how satan rejoices in your ineffectiveness!

**493** You cannot sanctify work which humanly speaking is slapdash, for we must not offer God badly-done jobs.

**494** By neglecting small details you could work on and on without rest and yet live the life of a perfect idler.

**495** You asked what you could offer the Lord. —I don't have to think twice about the answer: offer the same things as before, but do them better, finishing them off with a loving touch that will lead you to think more about Him and less about yourself.

**496** Here is a mission for ordinary Christians which is heroic and will always be relevant to the present day: to carry out in a holy way all different kinds of occupations even those that might seem least promising.

**497** Let us work. Let us work a lot and work well, without forgetting that prayer is our best weapon. That is why I will never tire of repeating that we have to be contemplative souls in the middle of the

world, who try to convert their work into prayer.

**498** You are writing to me in the kitchen, by the stove. It is early afternoon. It is cold. By your side, your younger sister – the last one to discover the divine folly of living her Christian vocation to the full – is peeling potatoes. To all appearances – you think – her work is the same as before. And yet, what a difference there is!

–It is true: before she *only* peeled potatoes, now, she is sanctifying herself peeling potatoes.

**499** You say that you are now beginning to understand what a “priestly soul” means. Don’t be annoyed with me if I tell you that the facts show that you only realise it in theory. –Every day the same thing happens to you: at night time, during the examination, it is all desire and resolutions; during the morning and afternoon at work, it is all objections and excuses.

Are you in this way living a “holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ”?

**500** When you started your ordinary work again, something like a groan of complaint escaped you: "It's always the same!"

And I told you: "Yes, it's always the same. But that ordinary job – which is the same one your fellow workers do – has to be a constant prayer for you. It has the same lovable words, but a different tune each day."

It is very much our mission to transform the prose of this life into poetry, into heroic verse.

**501** We read in the Scriptures: *Stultorum infinitus est numerus*, the number of fools is infinite, and they seem to grow more every day. In all sorts of places, in the most unexpected situations, under the mantle of high office and respected positions – and even in the guise of "virtue" – you will have to put up with so much forgetfulness and so little good judgement.

But I do not understand how you can lose the supernatural view of life and give up caring. There is nothing you can do but put up with these situations, though your

interior dispositions must be very poor if you put up with them for human motives.

If you do not help these people to find the right way by doing your work responsibly and finishing it well – by sanctifying it! – you will become like them, a fool. Either that or an accomplice.

**502** You really do need to make an effort and put your shoulder to the wheel... For all that, you should put your professional interests in their place: they are only means to an end; they can never be regarded – in any way – as if they were the basic thing.

How many of these forms of “professionalitis” make union with God impossible!

**503** Forgive my insistence: the instrument, the means, must not be made into an end. –If a spade were to weigh a hundred-weight instead of what it should, the labourer would be unable to dig with it. He would use up all his energy carrying it around, and the seed could not take root, for it would remain unused.

**504** It has always been the same: however upright and blameless the behaviour of someone at work may be, it can easily arouse rivalry, suspicion and envy. —If you occupy a position of authority, remember that some people may have prejudices against a particular colleague, but that is not sufficient reason for getting rid of “the accused”. It could be a sign, rather, that he would be useful in a greater enterprise.

**505** Obstacles...? Sometimes they may be present. But at times you just invent them out of cowardice or love of comfort. —How cleverly the devil makes those excuses for not working look plausible! He knows full well that sloth is the mother of all vices.

**506** You are untiring in your activity. But you fail to put order into it, so you do not have as much effect as you should. It puts me in mind of something I heard once from a very authoritative source. I happened to praise a subordinate in front of his superior. I said, “How hard he works!” “You ought to say”, I was told, “ ‘How much he rushes around!’”



—You are untiring in your activity, but it is all fruitless... How much you rush around!

**507** You tried to belittle somebody else's work by mumbling: "He has only done his duty."

And I said, "Does that seem so little to you?" The Lord gives us the happiness of Heaven for doing our duty: *Euge serve bone et fidelis... intra in gaudium Domini tui* — Well done good and faithful servant, enter into eternal joy!

**508** The Lord has the right to be glorified by us "at every moment" — it is an obligation for each one of us. So if we waste time we are robbing God of his glory.

**509** You know that the task is urgent, and that one minute given to comfort is time taken from the glory of God. Why, then, do you hesitate to make conscientious use of every moment?

Moreover, I ask you to think whether the minutes you have to spare throughout the day, which taken together come to



hours, might not be prompted by your disorder and laziness.

**510** Sadness and uneasiness grow in proportion to the time you waste.

—When you feel a holy impatience to use every minute you will be filled with joy and peace, because you will not be thinking about yourself.

**511** Preoccupations...? I replied I had no preoccupations, for I had enough occupations to keep me busy.

**512** You are going through a critical stage. You feel a certain vague fear and find it difficult to adapt your plan of life. Your work seems to weigh you down, since twenty-four hours are not enough for everything you ought to do each day...

—Have you tried following the Apostle's advice: "let all things be done decently and according to order"? That means, in the presence of God, with Him, through Him, and only for Him.

**513** When you parcel out your time, you

need also to think how you can make use of the odd moments that become free at unforeseen times.

**514** I have always seen rest as time set aside from daily tasks, never as days of idleness.

Rest means recuperation: to gain strength, form ideals and make plans. In other words it means a change of occupation, so that you can come back later with a new impetus to your daily job.

**515** Now that you've got a lot to do, all your "problems" have disappeared. —Be honest: as you have made up your mind to work for Him, you no longer have time to think about your own selfish interests.

**516** Ejaculatory prayers do not hinder your work, just as the beating of your heart does not impede the movements of the body.

**517** Sanctifying one's work is no fantastic dream, but the mission of every Christian — yours and mine.

—That is what that lathe-worker had discovered, when he said: “I am overwhelmed with happiness when I think how true it is that while I am working at the lathe and singing – singing all the time, on the outside and on the inside – I can become a saint. How good God is!”

**518** Your work has become disagreeable, especially when you see how little your colleagues love God and at the same time flee from grace and the good services you want to render them.

You have to try to make up for all that they leave out. You must give yourself to God in work too, as you have done up to now, and convert it into prayer that rises to Heaven for all mankind.

**519** Working with cheerfulness is not the same as “working away merrily” with no depth, as if you were getting rid of a troublesome burden.

—You must try not to lessen the value of your efforts through lack of attention or superficiality, so that in the end you are in danger of coming to God empty-handed.

**520** Some people act out of prejudice in their work: on principle they trust nobody, and it goes without saying that they do not understand the need to seek to sanctify their job. If you mention it to them they tell you not to add another burden to their own work, which they put up with reluctantly as if they were supporting a heavy weight.

—That is one of the battles of peace we have to win: to find God in our work and, with Him and like Him, serve others.

**521** You are put off by difficulties, and you shrink back. Do you know what characterises your behaviour? Nothing but comfort, comfort, and more comfort!

You had said that you were ready to wear yourself out, unstintingly, yet you still seem to be at the level of an apprentice to heroism. It is time to act with more maturity!

**522** As a student, you should dedicate yourself to your books with an apostolic spirit, and be convinced in your heart that one hour added to another already make up — even now! — a spiritual sacrifice offered

to God and profitable for all mankind, your country and your soul.

**523** You have a warhorse called study. You resolve a thousand times to make good use of your time, yet you are distracted by the merest thing. Sometimes you get annoyed at yourself, because of your lack of will, even though you begin again every day.

Have you tried offering up your study for specific apostolic intentions?

**524** It is easier to bustle about than to study, but it is also less effective.

**525** If you know that study is apostolate, but limit yourself to studying just enough to get by, it is clear that your interior life is going badly.

Such carelessness makes you lose the right spirit. Just like the worker in the parable who cunningly hid the talent he had received, you may, if you do not put things right, exclude yourself from God's friendship, and be stuck in the mire of your comfort-seeking calculations.

**526** You must study... but that is not enough.

What do those who kill themselves working to feed their self-esteem achieve? Or those who have nothing else in mind but assuring peace of mind for a few years ahead?

One has to study... to gain the world and conquer it for God. Then we can raise the level of our efforts: we can try to turn the work we do into an encounter with the Lord and the foundation to support those who will follow our way in the future.

In this way, study will become prayer.

**527** I have seen many people live heroic lives for God without leaving their own place of work, and I have come to this conclusion: for a Catholic work is not just a matter of fulfilling a duty – it is *to love*: to excel oneself gladly in duty and in sacrifice.

**528** When you come to understand that ideal of fraternal work for Christ, you will feel better, more secure, and as happy as one can be in this world, which so many are bent on making distorted and bitter by

following their own selfish aims alone.

**529** Sanctity is made up of heroic acts. Therefore, in our work we are asked for the heroism of *finishing* properly the tasks committed to us, day after day, even though they are the same tasks. If we don't, then we do not want to be saints!

**530** I was convinced by that priest who is a friend of ours. He was talking about his apostolic work, and he assured me that there are no tasks of little importance. Hidden under this garden covered in roses, he said, is the silent effort of so many souls who with their work and prayer, their prayer and work, have won from Heaven abundant showers of grace, which makes everything fertile.

**531** Place on your desk, in your room, in your wallet... a picture of Our Lady, and look at it when you begin your work, while you are doing it, and when you finish it. She will obtain, I assure you!, the strength for you to turn your task into a loving dialogue with God.



## FRIVOLITY

**532** When one thinks clearly about the poor things of this world, and compares them with the riches of life with Christ there is only one plain word, I can't help thinking, for the road that people choose: stupidity, stupidity, stupidity.

It is not just that most of us men make mistakes. There is something much worse about us: we are complete and utter fools.

**533** It is sad that you do not want to remain hidden as a foundation stone and support the building. But to become a stumbling block for others? I think that is villainous!



**534** Do not be scandalised because there are bad Christians who are active but do not practise. The Lord, says the Apostle, "will render to every man according to his works"; to you for yours, and to me, for mine.

—If you and I make up our minds to behave well, there will be two fewer scoundrels in the world for a start.

**535** If you do not fight against being frivolous, your head will be like a junk shop: you will only be storing up impossible ideals, false hopes, and... old rubbish.

**536** You are very independent-minded. If you made use of this in a supernatural way, it would help you to become a great Christian. But the way you use it just makes you very free and easy.

**537** You take everything so lightly that I am reminded of the old story. The cry went up: "There is a lion coming!" And the naturalist answered: "Why tell me? I catch butterflies."

**538** A terrible person is one who is ignorant but at the same time works tirelessly.

Take care that even when you are old and decrepit, you keep on wanting to be better trained.

**539** This is the excuse of a frivolous and selfish man: "I don't want to commit myself to anything."

**540** You neither want to be an evil man nor a good one. And so, limping on both legs, you will have mistaken your way and filled your life with emptiness.

**541** *In medio virtus* – Virtue is to be found in the mean, the wise saying goes, warning us against extremism. But do not make the mistake of turning that advice into a euphemism for your own comfort, calculation, tepidity, easy-goingness, lack of idealism and mediocrity.

Meditate on these words of Sacred Scripture: "Would that you were cold or hot. But because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth."

**542** You never reach the kernel of things. You always concern yourself with accidentals! –Allow me to repeat what Sacred Scripture says: you have only “spoken in the wind”!

**543** Don’t behave like those people who after hearing a sermon, instead of applying the doctrine to themselves, they think: that would suit So-and-so very well.

**544** Sometimes people think there is no malice in slander. It is the hypothesis, they say, by which ignorance explains what it does not know or understand, so as to appear well-informed.

But it is doubly evil: as ignorance and as a lie.

**545** Do not speak so irresponsibly... Don’t you realise that as soon as you throw the first stone others – anonymously – will organise a full-scale stoning?

**546** Is it you who are creating that atmosphere of discontent among those around you? –Forgive me then for having

to tell you that, apart from being bad, you are plain stupid.

**547** When some misfortune or mistake occurs, it is poor satisfaction to be able to say: "I knew it would happen."

It would mean that you are unconcerned with the troubles of your neighbour, for you should have sought a remedy if it was in your power to do so.

**548** There are many ways of sowing confusion. It is enough, for instance, to speak of the exception as if it were the general rule.

**549** You say you are a Catholic... That is why I feel so sorry for you when I see that your convictions lack the solidity needed to let you practise Catholicism in action, without introducing reservations or compartmentalising your life.

**550** It would be laughable, if it were not so sad, to see the naivety with which you accept – through superficiality, ignorance, or an inferiority complex – the most transparent nonsense.

**551** People who are stupid, unscrupulous, or hypocritical, think that others are just the same. And – this is the real pity – they treat them as if they were.

**552** It would be bad if you were to waste your time, which is not yours but God's and is meant for his glory. But if on top of that you make others waste it, you both diminish your own standing and defraud God of more of the glory you owe him.

**553** You lack the maturity and composure appropriate for those who make their way through this life with the certainty of an ideal, of a goal.

–Ask the Blessed Virgin to teach you how to praise God with your whole heart, without distractions of any kind.

## NATURALNESS

**554** The risen Christ: the greatest of miracles was seen by only a few... by those that were needed. Naturalness is the signature of divine enterprises.

**555** When we work wholly and exclusively for the glory of God, we do everything with naturalness, like someone who is in a hurry and will not be delayed by “making a great show of things”. In this way we do not cease to accompany the Lord, which is something unique and incomparable.

**556** Why, you asked indignantly, should the surroundings in which the apostolate has to be carried out and the things used to do it be ugly, dirty... and complicated? And

you added: It takes the same effort!

—I thought your indignation very reasonable. And I pondered how Jesus talked to everyone and attracted them all: poor and rich, wise and ignorant, cheerful and sad, young and old. How lovable and natural —supernatural — is his figure!

**557** To be effective you must be natural. What can one expect of a brush — even in the hands of a great painter — if it is wrapped in a silk cover?

**558** Saints always make other people feel “uncomfortable”.

**559** Saints, abnormal?... The time has come to do away with that prejudice.

We have to teach, with the supernatural naturalness of Christian asceticism, that not even mystical phenomena mean abnormality. These phenomena have their own naturalness... just as other psychological or physiological things have theirs.

**560** I talked to you about the horizon which opens up before our eyes and of the

road we have to follow. I have no objections, you said, as if surprised at not having any.

—Engrave this deeply on your mind: there is no reason why there should be!!

**561** Avoid that ridiculous adulation which, perhaps unconsciously, you pay to the person in charge, so that you automatically echo his tastes or opinions on points of no consequence.

—At the same time, you must be much more careful not to keep on showing up his defects as if they were amusing details, or to become too familiar detracting from his authority. Take care too not to render the sad service of letting the bad practice grow of turning something bad into a bit of a joke.

**562** You are creating an artificial climate around yourself, characterised by suspicion and a lack of trust. For when you speak, you give the impression of someone playing chess: you say each word thinking four moves ahead.

Notice that the Gospel, when



describing the wary and hypocritical character of the scribes and Pharisees, relates that they asked Jesus questions and put certain problems to him *ut caperent eum in sermone* – to twist his words! Flee from such behaviour.

**563** Naturalness has nothing to do with coarseness, or being shabby or doing things poorly, or being bad-mannered.

Some people are determined to reduce the service of God to working in the world of miserable and – forgive the expression – lousy poverty. Such work is and will always be admirable; but if we stop there, apart from abandoning the vast majority of souls, what should we do when we have brought them out of their need – ignore them?

**564** You are unworthy, are you? –Well... try to become worthy. And let that be the end of it.

**565** How you long to be extraordinary! –The trouble with such an ambition is how very vulgar it is.

**566** Blessed are you for believing, said Elizabeth to our Mother. –Union with God, supernatural virtue, always brings with it the attractive practice of human virtues: Mary brought joy to her cousin's home, because she "brought" Christ.

## TRUTHFULNESS

**567** You were praying before a crucifix, and you made this resolution: it is better to suffer for the truth, than for truth to suffer because of me.

**568** So often it seems impossible for the truth to be true! Above all because it always has to be lived consistently.

**569** If you are annoyed at being told the truth, then... why do you ask?

—Is it perhaps that you want to be answered with your own “truth” so your errant ways can be justified?

**570** You say that you have a great respect for the truth... Is that why you

always place yourself at such a "respectful" distance from it?

**571** Don't behave like a fool. No one is ever a fanatic for wanting to know better every day, and love more, and defend with greater conviction the truth he has to know, love and defend.

On the other hand – I say this without fear – those who oppose this reasonable behaviour in the name of a false liberty become sectarian.

**572** It is as easy now as it was at the time of Jesus Christ to say *No*, to deny or to put to one side the truth of faith. You who call yourself a Catholic have to start from *Yes*.

Later, after some study, you will be able to explain the reasons for your certainty, and that there is no contradiction – there can be none – between Truth and science, between Truth and life. \* \* wrong!

There is a contrast one

**573** Please don't abandon the task, don't deviate from the way, even though you have to live with people who are full of prejudices: as if you thought the basis of

arguments or the meaning of words were fixed by their behaviour or by their assertions.

—Do try to get them to understand you... but if you don't manage it, carry on anyway.

**574** You will find people who, because of their dull stubbornness, will be very difficult to convince... But, apart from those cases, it is worthwhile clearing up discrepancies, and clearing them up with all the patience that might be needed.

**575** Some people don't hear — don't want to hear — anything other than the words they have in their own heads.

**576** The understanding that so many people demand of others is that everyone should join their party.

**577** I cannot believe in your truthfulness if you feel no uneasiness — a disagreeable uneasiness! — when you countenance the smallest and most harmless lie. It is far from being small or harmless for it is an offence against God.

**578** Why do you look about you and listen and read and talk with such a mean intention, and why do you try to gather up the "bad things" to be found, not in the intention of others, but only in your own soul?

**579** For the reader who lacks an upright intention the honesty of the writer is hard to find.

**580** The sectarian sees only sectarianism in all the activities of others. He measures his neighbour by the sickly measure of his heart.

**581** I felt pity for that man in office. He suspected that there might have been some problems, which are, after all, to be expected in life... yet he was taken aback and annoyed when he was told about them. He preferred to remain ignorant of them, to live in the shadow or twilight of his own vision, so that he might remain at ease.

I advised him to face up to these things openly and clearly, so that in this very way they could be got rid of. I assured

him that then he would truly live in peace.

You must not solve problems, your own or those of others, by ignoring them; this would be nothing short of laziness and comfort-seeking, which would open the door to the action of the devil.

**582** Have you fulfilled your duty? Have you had a right intention? ... You have? — Then do not worry if there are twisted people who discover evil which only exists in their own minds.

**583** Inquisitive people asked you whether you judged that decision of yours, which they considered indifferent, to be good or bad.

And, with a sure conscience, you answered: "I know only two things: that my intention is honest... and that I know how much it cost me." And you added: God is the reason and the purpose of my life, that is why I am convinced that nothing can be indifferent.

**584** You explained your ideals and your sure, firm way of behaving as a Catholic,

and he seemed to accept and understand your way. But afterwards you were left doubting whether he might not have smothered his understanding under his not very well-ordered habits...

—Seek him out again, and explain to him that one accepts truth in order to live by it or try to live by it.

**585** Who are they to want to try things out first?... Why do they have to be mistrustful?, you ask me. —Look, tell them this from me: they should mistrust their own wretchedness. And then you must continue along your own way in peace.

**586** You feel sorry for them. With a complete lack of honesty they throw stones and pretend they haven't done so.

Listen to what the Holy Spirit has to say about them: "The forgers of error shall be confused and put to shame; they will all be covered in ignominy." It is a judgement which will be inexorably fulfilled.

**587** You say that many people libel and slander that apostolic enterprise?... Well, as



soon as you proclaim the truth, there will already be at least one person who isn't criticising.

**588** In the most beautiful and promising field of wheat, it is easy to weed out cart-loads of charlock, poppies and couch-grass.

Throughout history, the most upright and responsible people have been the object of volumes of malice. Think, too, how much has been said and written against Our Lord Jesus Christ.

I advise you – just as with the field of grain – to collect the golden ripe ears of wheat: the true truth.

**589** You assured me that you want to have a clean conscience, so don't forget that to pick up a calumny without denying it is to become a refuse-collector.

**590** You call it open-mindedness to admit easily any assertion against a person without hearing what he has to say. This propensity of yours is not precisely justice... even less is it charity.

**591** A calumny sometimes causes harm to those who suffer it... But it truly dishonours those who invent it and spread it... And afterwards they carry a weight in the depth of their souls.

**592** “Why do so many people spread slander?”, you ask in distress...

—Some do so through error, fanaticism or malice. —But most of them pass on the story through inertia, superficiality and ignorance.

That is why, I insist again: when you cannot praise, and there is no need to speak, keep quiet!

**593** When the victim of the slander suffers in silence, “the executioners” are relentless in their bold cowardice.

Distrust those categorical assertions if those who utter them have made no attempt, or have preferred not to speak with the person concerned.

**594** There are many ways of holding an investigation. With a bit of malice, by listening to slanders, ten large volumes can

be compiled against any honest person or worthy enterprise. —There will be more if that person or enterprise works effectively. —And even more if that effectiveness is apostolic.

It is sorry work for the investigators, but more pitiful still is the attitude adopted by those who are ready to echo such wicked and superficial assertions.

**595** These people, he said sadly, do not have the mind of Christ, but the mask of Christ... That is why they lack Christian judgement, cannot grasp the truth, and yield no fruit.

We, the sons of God, must not forget that the Master said: "Whoever listens to you, listens to me..." —That is why we have to try to be Christ: never a caricature of him.

**596** In this case, as in so many others, people are doing various things and all think they are right. But God is guiding them, that is to say, over and above their own particular ideas, God's inscrutable and most lovable Providence will win through

in the end.

Allow yourself, therefore, to be *guided* by the Lord, without opposing his plans, even though they might go against your "basic assumptions".

**597** It is painful to see that some people are less concerned with learning and taking possession of the treasures acquired by science than they are in spending their time tailoring them to their own taste through a more or less arbitrary process.

But being aware of this must lead you to redouble your effort to go more deeply into the truth.

**598** It is easier to write against people carrying out research, or against those who make new discoveries in science or technology, than to do the research oneself. —But we should not allow those "critics" to pretend at the same time to set themselves up as absolute lords of wisdom who can govern the opinions of the ignorant.

**599** "I just don't see that, it is not at all obvious", he said in response to the certain

statements of the others... And the obvious thing was his own ignorance.

**600** You are afraid of hurting people, of creating divisions and appearing intolerant... and you are giving in on positions and points which – though you assure me they are not serious! – have fateful consequences for many.

Forgive my sincerity: through your behaviour, you are falling into just the foolish and harmful intolerance that you were concerned to avoid: that of not allowing the truth to be proclaimed.

**601** God in his infinite and perfect justice and mercy treats with the same love, but in an unequal way, his unequal children.

That is why equality does not mean using the same measure for everybody.

**602** You speak a half-truth which is open to so many interpretations that it can really be called... a lie.

**603** Doubt, whether it concerns the field of knowledge or the good name of others,

is a plant that is easily sown but very difficult to root out.

**604** You remind me of Pilate: *Quod scripsi, scripsi!* – what I have written shall not be changed – after he had allowed the most horrible of crimes. You may be immovable, but you ought to have adopted that attitude before... not afterwards!

**605** It is a virtue to act in accordance with our resolutions. But, if in the course of time we think that the facts have changed, we must also act accordingly by changing the way of looking at the problem and solving it.

**606** Don't confuse holy intransigence with small-minded obstinacy.

"I'll break, but I won't bend", you said cheerfully and somewhat arrogantly.

–Listen to me carefully: A broken instrument remains useless, and leaves the way open to those who, with apparent leniency, afterwards impose a pernicious intransigence.

**607** *Sancta Maria, Sedes Sapientiae*  
– Holy Mary, Seat of Wisdom. –Invoke  
Our Mother often in that way, so that she  
may fill her children, in their study, work  
and social relations, with the Truth that  
Christ has brought to us.

## AMBITION

**608** Against those who reduce religion to a set of negative statements, or are happy to settle for a watered-down Catholicism; against those who wish to see the Lord with his face against the wall, or to put him in a corner of their souls... we have to affirm, with our words and with our deeds, that we aspire to make Christ the King reign indeed over all hearts... theirs included.

**609** When you work in apostolic enterprises, do not build for the present alone... Dedicate yourself to these tasks with the hope that others – brothers of yours sharing the same spirit as you – may reap what you are now sowing abroad, and may crown the buildings for which you are



now laying the foundations.

**610** When you truly become filled with the Christian spirit your ambitions will be put right. —You will feel no longer a hankering after celebrity, but a desire for perpetuating your ideal.

**611** It would not be worth giving oneself unless it were to build up a great work which is very much for God — your own holiness.

That is why the Church, when canonising saints, proclaims the heroism of their lives.

**612** When you work in earnest for the Lord, your greatest satisfaction will be that there are many others competing with you.

**613** In this time of God, the time when you are in this world, make up your mind in earnest to do something worthwhile; time is pressing and the mission of men, of women, on earth is so noble, heroic and glorious when it enkindles withered and rotten hearts with the fire of Christ!

—It is worthwhile taking peace and happiness to others through a robust and jubilant crusade.

**614** You are ready to give your life for your honour... Be ready to give up your honour for your soul.

**615** Through the Communion of Saints you should feel very closely united to your brothers. Defend that holy unity without fear!

—If you were alone, your noble ambitions would be doomed to failure. A sheep on its own is nearly always a lost sheep.

**616** I was amused by your vehemence. Faced by the lack of material resources to set to work, and with no one to help you, you said: "I have only two arms, but I sometimes feel impatient enough to become a monster with fifty arms to sow and reap the harvest."

—Ask the Holy Spirit for that effectiveness... for he will grant it to you!

**617** You found yourself with two books

in Russian, and you felt an enormous desire to learn that language. You imagined the beauty of dying like a grain of wheat in that nation, now so arid, which in time will yield great harvests of wheat.

—I think that those ambitions are good. But, for now, dedicate yourself to the small task and great mission of every day, to your study, your work, your apostolate, and, above all, to your formation. This, since you still need to do so much pruning, is neither a less heroic nor a less beautiful task.

**618** What use is a student who does not study?

**619** When you find studying is an awfully uphill task offer that effort to Jesus. Tell him that you continue poring over your books, so that you may use your knowledge as a weapon to fight his enemies and so gain many souls for him... You can then be sure that your study is well on its way to becoming prayer.

**620** If you waste hours and days, if you

kill time, you are opening the doors of your soul to the devil. That way of behaving is equivalent to saying to him: "Make yourself at home."

**621** I grant you it is difficult not to waste time. But notice that God's enemy, the "other side", does not rest.

What is more, remember the truth that Paul, a champion of the love of God, proclaims, *Tempus breve est!* This life is slipping away through our fingers, and it is impossible to recover it.

**622** Do you realise how much depends on whether you are soundly prepared or not? Many, many souls!

—And now will you cease to study or work with perfection?

**623** There are two ways of reaching the top: one — the Christian way — by the noble and gallant effort of serving others; the other — the pagan way — by the mean and ignoble effort of dragging down your neighbour.

**624** Don't try to convince me that you live facing God, if you do not try always and in everything, to face men, any man, with sincere and open fraternity.

**625** Those who are "ambitious", with small, personal, miserable ambitions, cannot understand that the friends of God should seek to achieve something through a spirit of service and without such "ambition".

**626** You are anxious for one thing: to hurry and soon be forged, moulded, polished and hammered into the piece that fits and will fulfil effectively the work it has been designed to do. This work is the mission it has been assigned to...in the vast field of Christ.

I pray a great deal that this desire of yours may spur you on when you are tired, when you fail and in the hour of darkness... for "the mission it has been assigned to in the vast field of Christ" cannot change.

**627** Fight courageously against that false humility – you should call it spirit of

comfort – which stops you from behaving like a good son of God. You have to grow out of it!

Are you not ashamed when you see that your elder brothers have spent years in dedicated work, and you are not yet able, or do not want to be able, to lift a finger to help them?

**628** Allow your soul to be consumed by desires – desires for loving, for being forgotten, for holiness, for Heaven. Do not stop to wonder whether the time will come to see them accomplished, as some pseudo-adviser might suggest. Make them more fervent every day, for the Holy Spirit says that he is pleased with *men of desires*.

Let your desires be operative and put them into practice in your daily tasks.

**629** If the Lord has called you a *friend* you must respond to the call and walk with a hurried pace, with all the urgency needed, at God's pace! Otherwise you run the risk of becoming a simple spectator.

**630** Forget about yourself... May your

ambition be to live for your brothers alone, for souls, for the Church; in one word, for God.

**631** In the middle of the rejoicing at the feast in Cana, only Mary notices that they are short of wine... A soul will notice even the smallest details of service if, like her, it is alive with a passion for helping its neighbour, for God.

## HYPOCRISY

**632** Hypocrisy always leads those who cultivate it to a life of bitter and grudging mortification.

**633** Herod said: "Go and enquire carefully for the child, and when you have found him, bring me back word, so that I too may come and worship him." Faced by proposals such as this, let us ask the Holy Spirit to keep us from the "protection" or the "promise of good things" of people who appear well-intentioned.

—We will not lack the light of the Paraclete if, as the Wise Men did, we seek the truth and speak with sincerity.

**634** Are there people who protest



because you say things clearly? Perhaps they live with a troubled conscience, and they need to cover it up in that way.

—You should continue to behave in the same way, to help them to change.

**635** While you continue to interpret in bad faith the intentions of your neighbour, you have no right to demand that people should be understanding with you.

**636** You are constantly talking about the need to change and reform things. Good... Reform yourself! For you need it badly, and already you will have begun the great reform.

In the meantime, I shall not be putting too much faith in your proclamations of reform.

**637** There are some who are so pharisaical that... they are scandalized when others repeat precisely what their own lips have let fall.

**638** You are such a busybody that it seems as if your only concern were to dive

into the lives of your neighbours. And when, at last, you stumble upon an upright man of good will and energy who has stopped you in your tracks, you complain in public as if he had offended you.

—Your shamelessness and deformed conscience..., have led you thus far. And that goes for many others.

**639** In one move, you have tried to appropriate the “honesty” of the true opinion and the ignoble “advantages” of the opposite opinion...

—That, in any language, is called duplicity.

**640** How good they are!!... They are ready to “excuse” what is only worthy of praise.

**641** It is an old stratagem for the persecutor to say that he is being persecuted... Popular wisdom has seen right through this all along. In the words of the old Spanish saying: “They throw the stone and then bandage themselves up.”

**642** Is it not true, unfortunately, that many people spread calumnies unjustly and then make their appeal to charity and honesty so that their victims cannot defend themselves?

**643** It is a sad ecumenism indeed when Catholics who take part in it ill-treat other Catholics!

**644** What a mistaken view of objectivity they have! They focus upon people or tasks through the deformed lenses of their own defects and then, with acid shamelessness, criticise or dare to offer their advice.

—Let us make a firm resolution: when we correct or give advice, let us speak in the presence of God, and apply our words to our own behaviour.

**645** Never have recourse to the always deplorable method of organising slanderous attacks on anyone... It is even worse if it is done through allegedly moral motives, which can never justify an immoral action.

**646** You can never give advice dispassionately or with a right intention, if you get upset or think people show a lack of confidence in you when they also listen to the advice of other people of proven formation and good doctrine.

—If you are really interested, as you claim, in the good of souls and in stating the truth, why are you offended?

**647** Not even to Joseph does Mary communicate the mystery that God has wrought in her. —This lesson teaches us not to become accustomed to speaking lightly but to channel our joys and our sorrows correctly without seeking praise or sympathy. *Deo omnis gloria!* — all for God!

## INTERIOR LIFE

**648** More is achieved by<sup>1</sup> whoever goes up closer to plead... That is why you must get close to God and be intent on becoming a saint.

**649** I like to compare the interior life to clothing, to the wedding garment the Gospel speaks about. The cloth is woven from all the habits or acts of piety which, like threads, together give strength to the cloth. And so, just as a torn dress is rejected even though the rest of the material is in good condition, if you pray and work... but are not penitent (or the other way round) your interior life is not (so to speak) complete.

**650** When will you realise that your only possible way is to seek sanctity seriously.

Make up your mind – don't be offended – to take God seriously. That levity of yours, if you do not fight against it, could end up by becoming a sad and blasphemous mockery.

**651** You sometimes allow the bad side of your character to come out, and it has shown itself, on more than one occasion, in an absurd harshness. At other times, you do not bother to prepare your heart and your head so that they may be a worthy dwelling for the Most Holy Trinity... And you invariably end up by remaining rather distant from Jesus, whom you know so little.

–If you go on like this, you will never have interior life.

**652** *Iesus Christus, perfectus Deus, perfectus Homo* – Jesus Christ, perfect God and perfect Man.

There are many Christians who follow Christ and are astonished by his divinity, but forget him as Man... And they

fail in the practice of supernatural virtues, despite all the external paraphernalia of piety, because they do nothing to acquire human virtues.

**653** Personal sanctity is a remedy for everything! –That is why the saints have been full of peace, of fortitude, of joy, of security...

**654** Until now you had not understood the message that we Christians bring to the rest of men: the hidden marvel of the interior life.

What a wonderful new world you are placing in front of them!

**655** How many new things you have discovered! And yet you are sometimes rather naive and think you have seen everything, that you have found out everything already. As time goes by, you will be able to reach out and touch the unique and unfathomable treasures of the Lord, who will always show you *new things*, if you respond with love and sensitivity. Then you will realise that you

are only beginning, because holiness consists in identifying oneself with God, with that God of ours who is infinite and inexhaustible.

**656** It is through Love rather than study that one comes to understand the *things of God*.

That is why you have to work, you have to study, you have to accept illness, you have to be sober – lovingly!

**657** Here is a point for your daily examination. Have I allowed an hour to pass, without talking with my Father God? Have I talked to him with the love of a son? You can!

**658** We should make no mistake... God is no shadowy or distant being who created us then abandoned us; nor is he a master who goes away and does not return. Though we do not perceive him with our senses, his existence is far more true than any of the realities which we touch and see. God is here with us, really present, living. He sees and hears us, He guides us, and



knows our smallest deeds, our most hidden intentions.

We believe this – but we live as if God did not exist. For we do not have a thought or a word for him; for we do not obey him, nor try to control our passions; for we do not show that we love him, and we do not atone...

–Are we going to continue living with a *dead faith*?

**659** If you had presence of God you would remedy many things that have apparently “no remedy”.

**660** How are you going to live in God’s presence if you are only looking around everywhere? – It is as if you were drunk with novelties and futilities.

**661** It is possible that you might be frightened by this word: *meditation*. It makes you think of books with old black covers, the sound of sighs and the irksome repetition of routine prayers... But that is not meditation.

To meditate is to consider, to

contemplate God as your Father, and yourself as his son in need of help. And then to give him thanks for all that he has given you and for all that he will give you.

**662** This is the only way to get to know Jesus: speak to him! You will always find in him a Father, a Friend, an Adviser, a Helper in all the noble deeds of your everyday life.

—And getting to know Him will give rise to Love.

**663** You go on attending some classes daily, merely because in them you acquire a certain rather limited knowledge... How is it then that you are not constant in going to the Master, who is always ready to teach you the science of interior life, with its eternal content and savour?

**664** What is a man or the greatest reward on earth worth compared with Jesus Christ, who is always ready to be with you?

**665** To meditate for a while each day and be united in friendship with God is

something that makes sense to people who know how to make good use of their lives. It befits conscientious Christians who live up to their convictions.

**666** Those in love don't know how to say good-bye: they are with one another all the time.

—Do you and I know how to love the Lord like this?

**667** Haven't you noticed how people in love dress to please one another by their appearance? —Well that is how you should tidy up and deck out your soul.

**668** Grace, like nature, normally acts gradually. We cannot, properly speaking, move ahead of grace. But in all that does depend on us we have to prepare the way and co-operate when God grants grace to us.

Souls have to be encouraged to aim very high; they have to be impelled towards Christ's ideal. Lead them to the highest goals which should not be reduced or made weaker in any way. But remember that sanctity is not primarily worked out

with one's own hands. Grace normally takes its time, and is not inclined to act with violence.

Encourage your holy impatience, but don't lose your patience.

**669** Is corresponding to divine grace, you ask, a matter of justice... or generosity...?

—It is a matter of Love!

**670** “My affairs buzz around in my head at the most inopportune moments...”, you say.

That is why I have recommended you to try to establish some times for interior silence... and to guard your external and internal senses.

**671** “Stay with us, it is towards evening...” The prayer of Cleophas and his companion was effective.

—How sad it would be if you and I were not able to “detain” Jesus who is passing by! What a shame not to ask him to stay!

**672** I advised you to read the New

Testament for some minutes every day, and to enter into each scene and take part in it, as one more of the characters. This is so that you *incarnate* the Gospel, so that it is “fulfilled” in your life... and “make others fulfil it”.

**673** Once you used to “enjoy” yourself a lot. —But now that you bear Christ within you, your whole life has been filled with a sincere and infectious joy. That is why you attract other people.

—Get to know Him better, so that you can reach all people.

**674** Be careful you don’t get it wrong! —While you raise the temperature of the atmosphere around you make sure you do not cool down.

**675** Get accustomed to referring everything to God.

**676** Have you noticed how many of your companions know how to be very kind and considerate when dealing with the people they love, whether it is their girl-friend,

their wife, their children or their family?

—Tell them — and ask it of yourself too — that the Lord does not deserve less. They must treat him that way! Advise them, besides, to continue practising that kindness and consideration, but do it with Him and for Him, and they will achieve, even here on earth, a happiness they had never dreamed of.

**677** The Lord sowed good seed in your soul. And for that sowing of eternal life he used the powerful means of prayer. For you cannot deny that often while you were in front of the Tabernacle, face to face with him, he made you hear in the depths of your soul that he wanted you for himself, that you had to leave everything... If you denied it now you would be a miserable traitor. And if you have forgotten it you are ungrateful.

Do not doubt, for you have never doubted it up to now, that he has also used the supernatural advice and suggestions of your director, who has insistently repeated to you things that you cannot ignore. At the beginning, too, to deposit the good seed in

your soul He used that noble, sincere friend, who told you some home truths which were filled with the love of God.

—But you have discovered and have been naively surprised that the enemy has sown tares in your soul. And he will continue to sow it, as long as you are comfortably asleep and slacken off in your interior life. That, and no other, is the reason why you find clinging to your soul all sorts of worldly weeds, which sometimes seem as if they are going to choke the grain of the good wheat you received...

—Uproot them once and for all! God's grace is enough for you. Do not be afraid of leaving an empty space, a wound. The Lord will plant new seed of his there: love of God, fraternal charity, apostolic zeal. And after a certain time not the slightest sign will remain of those tares. That is if, while there is still time, you pull it out by the roots, and better still, if you do not fall asleep, and watch your field overnight.

**678** Jesus speaks to us all the time, and happy are those blessed souls who, when



they hear Jesus being spoken about, recognise him immediately as the Way, the Truth and the Life.

—You are well aware that when we do not enjoy that happiness it is because we have lacked the determination to follow him.

**679** Once again you felt Christ was very near. —And once again you realised that you have to do everything for him.

**680** Come closer to the Lord... Closer! —Until he becomes your Friend, your Confidante, your Guide.

**681** Every day you notice that you are more rooted in God... you tell me. —Every day, then, you will be closer to your brothers.

**682** If until now, when you had not yet found Him, you wanted to run through life with your eyes wide open, to find out about everything, from this moment onwards you can run with a clear vision, to see with him what is really of abiding interest to you.



**683** When there is interior life, you can have recourse to God in any difficulty, with the spontaneity with which blood rushes to a wound.

**684** “This is my Body...”, and the immolation of Jesus took place, hidden under the appearances of the bread. He is now there, with his Flesh and with his Blood, with his Soul and with his Divinity. He is the same as on the day that Thomas placed his fingers in His glorious Wounds.

And yet, on so many occasions, you saunter by, giving not even a hint of a greeting out of simple good manners that you would give to any person you knew when you met him.

—You have much less faith than Thomas!

**685** If, to free you, a close friend of yours had gone to prison, would you not try to visit him, to talk to him for a while, take him some present, console him and show him the warmth of your friendship...? And, if that conversation with the prisoner were to save you from some evil and do you

good... would you go without it? And if instead of a friend it were to be your father himself or your brother?

—Well then!

**686** Jesus has remained in the Sacred Host for us! So as to stay by our side, to sustain us, to guide us. —And love can only be repaid with love.

—How could we not turn to the Blessed Sacrament each day, even if it is only for a few minutes, to bring him our greetings and our love as children and as brothers?

**687** Have you seen it happening? Any old sergeant or a low ranking second lieutenant... sees coming towards him a fine-looking recruit, of an incomparably better quality than the officer; but the salute and its return are still given.

Meditate on the contrast. From the tabernacle of that church, Christ, perfect God, perfect Man, who has died for you on the Cross and gives you everything that you need... approaches you. And you go by without paying any attention to him.

**688** You have started to visit the Blessed Sacrament every day... I am not surprised to hear you say, "I have come to love the sanctuary light madly."

**689** Do not neglect to say, "Jesus, I love you", and make one spiritual communion, at least, each day, in atonement for all the profanations and sacrileges he suffers because he wants to be with us.

**690** Do you not greet warmly all the people you love, and speak to them cordially? –Well, you and I are going to greet Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and our Guardian Angels, many times a day.

**691** Develop a lively devotion for Our Mother. She knows how to respond in a most sensitive way to the presents we give her.

What is more, if you say the Holy Rosary every day, with a spirit of faith and love, Our Lady will make sure she leads you very far along her Son's path.

**692** Without Our Mother's aid, how can

we manage to keep up our daily struggle?  
—Do you seek it constantly?

**693** The Guardian Angel always accompanies us as our principal witness. It is he who, at your particular judgement, will remember the kind deeds you performed for Our Lord throughout your life. Furthermore, when you feel lost, before the terrible accusations of the enemy, your Angel will present those intimate desires of your heart — which perhaps you yourself might have forgotten — those proofs of love which you might have had for God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit.

That is why you must never forget your Guardian Angel, and that Prince of Heaven shall not abandon you now, or at that decisive moment.

**694** Your Communions were very cold: you paid little attention to the Lord: you were distracted by the smallest trifle... But ever since you began to realise during an intimate dialogue with God that the angels are present, your attitude has changed...

“Let them not see me like this!”, you say to yourself...

—And see how, as a result of thinking, “What will they say?” — this time, for a good motive — you have advanced a little towards Love.

**695** When you see yourself with a dry heart, without knowing what to say, go with confidence to the Virgin Mary. Say to her, “My Mother Immaculate, intercede for me.”

If you invoke her with faith, she will make you taste in the midst of your dryness the proximity of God.



## PRIDE

**696** Pull self-love out by the roots and plant in its place love for Jesus Christ. That is the secret of effectiveness and happiness.

**697** Although you say you follow Him, in one way or another you always make sure that it is “you” who do things, according to “your” plans, relying on “your” strength alone. –But the Lord said: *Sine Me nihil!* – without Me you can do nothing.

**698** They ignored what you call your “rights”, which I translated for you as your “right to be proud”. What a grotesque figure you cut. Because your attacker was powerful you could not defend yourself

and you felt the pain of a hundred blows. And despite it all, you have not learned to humble yourself.

Now your conscience accuses you, calling you proud... and cowardly. —Give thanks to God because you are beginning to catch a glimpse of your “duty to be humble”.

**699** All the time it is you, you, you. —And you will never be effective until it is him, him, him, so that you act *in nomine Domini* — in the name and with the strength of God.

**700** How can you pretend to follow Christ, if you only revolve around yourself?

**701** An impatient and disordered anxiousness to climb up the professional ladder can mask self-love under the appearances of “serving souls”. It is a lie — and I really mean that — when we seek to justify our actions by saying that we must not miss certain opportunities, certain favourable chances.

Turn your eyes back to Jesus; he is



“the Way”. During his hidden years, there were also “very favourable” chances to advance his public life – when he was twelve years old, for instance, and the doctors of the law were in amazement at his questions and at the answers he gave. But Jesus Christ fulfils the Will of his Father, and he waits. He obeys!

–Do not lose that holy ambition of yours to lead the whole world to God, but when those ideas present themselves (they might show perhaps a desire to desert) remember that you too have to be obedient and work away at that obscure job, which does not seem at all brilliant, for as long as God asks nothing else of you. He has his own times and paths.

**702** Those who enjoy privilege thanks to money, ancestry, rank, position or intelligence... and abuse it by humiliating those who are less fortunate, show that they are fatuous and proud.

**703** Pride sooner or later ends up humiliating a man in front of others, however much of “a man” he is, since he

will have been acting like a vain and brainless puppet, moved by satan's strings.

**704** Through presumption or simply through vanity, many people run a black market to raise their own personal worth artificially.

**705** Positions... Who's in, who's out? —What does it matter to you? You have come, you tell me, to be useful, to serve, with complete availability. Behave accordingly.

**706** You comment and criticise... Without you, it seems, nothing is done properly.

—Don't be angry if I tell you that you are behaving like an arrogant despot.

**707** A friend of yours, loyally and charitably, points out to you, on your own, certain things which tend to mar your behaviour. You then become convinced that he is mistaken: he doesn't understand you. If that false conviction, born of your pride, remains, you will never change.

—I pity you: you lack the decision to seek holiness.

**708** Malicious, suspicious, devious, mistrustful, grudging... these are all adjectives which you deserve, even though they might annoy you.

—You must put things right. Why is it others always have to be bad... and you good?

**709** You feel lonely... you complain... everything annoys you. —That is because you are isolated from your brothers by your selfishness, and because you do not come closer to God.

**710** You are always seeking people's obvious attention! But, above all, that they should pay more attention to you than to anybody else.

**711** Why do you always think that everything you are told has a hidden meaning? By being so touchy you are limiting the action of grace all the time. And do not doubt that grace comes to you by means of those who fight to match their deeds to Christ's ideal.

**712** For as long as you are convinced that others should always be paying you all their attention, and for as long as you delay the decision to serve (to hide yourself and disappear from view), your dealings with your brothers, colleagues and friends will be a constant source of disappointment, ill-humour...: of pride.

**713** Detest showing off. —Reject vanity. —Fight against pride, every day, at every moment.

**714** The proud, poor creatures, have to suffer a thousand silly little things which their self-love makes out to be enormous but are unnoticed by others.

**715** Do you think that no one else has ever been twenty years old? Do you think they were never restricted by their parents when they were under age? Do you think they avoided the problems, however great or small, that you come up against? No. They went through the same things that you are going through now, and they matured, with the help of grace. They trod

down their selfishness with generous perseverance, gave in when they should, and remained loyal – with calm humility – without being arrogant or hurting anyone when they should not have done.

**716** Ideologically you are very Catholic. You like the atmosphere of the hall of residence. A pity the Mass is not at twelve, and the classes are not in the afternoon, so you can study late in the evening after one or two drinks. That “Catholicism” of yours does not come up to the real thing: it remains simply *bourgeois*.

—Don’t you see that you can’t think like that at your age? Leave behind your laziness and your self-worship... and adapt to the needs of others, to the reality around you, then you will be taking your Catholicism seriously.

**717** A person who had donated a statue of a saint to a church said: “This saint owes everything that he is to me.”

This is not just a caricature. You also think – at least that is how it looks from your behaviour – that you fulfil your duties

towards God just by wearing some medals or practising certain pious customs, more or less as a routine.

**718** If only they could see the good things I do!... —But don't you realise that you are carrying them around like trinkets in a basket for people to see how fine they are?

Furthermore, you must not forget the second part of Jesus' command: "that they may glorify your Father who is in heaven."

**719** "To me, with the admiration I owe myself", he wrote on the first page of a book. And many other miserable souls might easily print the same thing on the last page of their life.

How sad it would be if you and I were to live or end up like this.

—Let us make a serious examination of conscience.

**720** Never adopt a superior air towards Church matters, or towards your fellow human beings, your brothers... On the other hand that attitude might be necessary in

your social behaviour, when it is a matter of defending the interests of God and those of souls, for then you would not be acting out of superiority, but out of faith and fortitude, which we will practise with a calm and humble confidence.

**721** It is indiscreet, childish and silly to say nice things about others and praise their good qualities in front of them.

—In this way vanity is encouraged, with the risk of *stealing* glory from God, to whom everything is due.

**722** Make sure that your good intentions are always accompanied by humility. Because good intentions often go together with harsh judgements, almost amounting to an incapacity to yield, and a certain personal, national or party pride.

**723** Do not be disheartened when you become aware of your mistakes. React against them.

—Sterility is not so much a consequence of one's faults, especially if one repents, as a consequence of pride.



**724** If you fall, get up with greater hope... Self-love alone is incapable of understanding that an error, when put right, helps us to know and to humble ourselves.

**725** "We are no use." –A pessimistic and false statement. –If we want to, with the help of God, which is the first and fundamental requirement, we can become useful, as a good instrument, for many enterprises.

**726** It made me think when I heard that hard but true saying from a man of God, when he observed the haughtiness of a miserable creature: "He wears the same skin as the devil – pride."

And there came to my mind, in contrast, a sincere desire to wrap myself in the virtue taught by Jesus Christ when he said, *Quia mitis sum et humilis corde* – I am meek and humble of heart. It was the virtue which attracted the gaze of the Most Holy Trinity to his Mother and our Mother: the humility of knowing and having the feeling that we are nothing.



## FRIENDSHIP

**727** When you find it difficult to do a favour or a service for someone, remember that he or she is a child of God, and that the Lord has asked us to love one another.

—And I'd say more: go deeper into that evangelical precept every day; do not remain on the surface. Draw the right conclusions from it — it is quite easy to do so. Then adapt your behaviour, on every occasion, to those requirements.

**728** “There is so much hurry in the way we live that Christian charity has become a rare phenomenon in this world of ours, even though, at least nominally, Christ is being preached.”

—I grant you that. But what are you

doing about it as a Catholic, you who have to become united to him, and follow in his footsteps? Because he has told us that we must go and teach his doctrine to *all* peoples – all peoples – throughout the ages.

**729** Men – this has always happened in history – bind their lives together to accomplish a collective mission and destiny.

–Is the *unique destiny* of eternal happiness worth less to the men and women of today?

**730** You understood the meaning of friendship when you began to feel that you were like the shepherd of a little flock which you had left abandoned, but were now trying to gather together again, taking it upon yourself to serve each one of them.

**731** You cannot just be passive. You have to become a real friend of your friends – *by helping them*. First, with the example of your behaviour and then with your advice and with the influence that a close friendship provides.

**732** The spirit of fraternity and companionship you discovered unexpectedly filled you with enthusiasm. —That is natural, for it was something you had dreamed about longingly but had never experienced. You had not experienced it because men forget they are brothers of Christ, that lovable Brother of ours, who gave his life for us, for every single one of us, without reserve.

**733** You have had the good fortune to find real teachers, authentic friends, who have taught you everything you wanted to know without holding back. You have had no need to employ any tricks to *steal* their knowledge, because they led you along the easiest path, even though it had cost them a lot of hard work and suffering to discover it... Now, it is your turn to do the same, with one person, and another — with everyone!

**734** Meditate on this carefully and act accordingly: people who think you are unpleasant will stop thinking that when they realise that you *really* love them. It is up to you.

**735** It's not enough to be good; you need to show it. What would you say of a rose bush which produced only thorns?

**736** To be warmed up, the tepid need to be surrounded by the fire of enthusiasm.

Many could cry out: "There is no point in your lamenting my situation! Teach me how to get out of this condition which saddens you so much!"

**737** Your duty to be a brother to all souls will lead you to practise the "apostolate of little things", without others noticing it. You will want to serve them so that their way becomes agreeable.

**738** Those who zealously keep a "list of grudges" show themselves to be very narrow-minded souls! Such poor wretches are impossible to live with.

True charity neither keeps account of the necessary services it renders all the time, nor takes note of the effronteries it has to put up with. *Omnia suffert* — it endures all things.

**739** You fulfil a demanding plan of life: you rise early, you pray, you frequent the sacraments, you work or study a lot, you are sober and mortified... but you are aware that something is missing!

Consider this in your conversation with God: since holiness, or the struggle to achieve it, is the fullness of charity, you must look again at your love of God and your love of others for his sake. Then you may discover, hidden in your soul, great defects that you have not even been fighting against: your not being a good son, a good brother, a good companion, a good friend, a good colleague. And that, since you love "your holiness" in a disordered manner, you are envious.

You "sacrifice" yourself in many small *personal* details, and so you are attached to yourself, to your own person. Deep down you do not live for God or for others, but only for yourself.

**740** You consider yourself a friend because you say nothing bad. —That is true, but I see in you no sign of giving good example or service.

—This kind make the worst friends.

**741** For a start, you treat people badly. Then, before anybody has time to react, you say: "Now, we must all be charitable!"

—If you began with the second point you would never come to the first.

**742** Don't be someone who sows discord, like the person whose own mother would say of him: "Introduce him to your friends, and he will make sure those friends quarrel with you."

**743** I can see no Christian fraternity in a friend who warns you: "I've been told some terrible things about you. You shouldn't trust someone among those close to you."

I think it is not Christian because that "brother" has not had the noble reaction of silencing the slanderer first, and then telling you his name out of loyalty.

If that "brother" does not have the strength of character to demand such behaviour of himself, he will be risking your being left on your own, driving you to distrust everyone and to be uncharitable

towards everyone.

**744** You don't have an ounce of supernatural vision and it is only their social standing that you notice. Souls mean nothing to you at all, nor do you serve them. That is why you are not generous... but live far from God with your false piety, even though you may pray a lot.

The Master has said very clearly: "Depart from me . . . into that eternal fire . . . for I was hungry . . . I was thirsty . . . I was in prison . . . and you did not care for me."

**745** It is impossible to love God with perfection, and at the same time to let yourself be ruled by selfishness –or by apathy– in your dealings with your neighbour.

**746** True friendship also means making a heartfelt effort to understand the convictions of our friends, even though we may never come to share them or accept them.

**747** Never allow weeds to grow on the path of friendship. Be loyal.



- 748** Let us make a firm resolution about our friendships. In my thoughts, words and deeds towards my neighbour, whoever he may be, may I not behave as I have done up to now. That is to say, may I never cease to practise charity, or allow indifference to enter my soul.
- 749** Your charity must be adapted and tailored to the needs of others... not to yours.
- 750** Children of God! A condition which transforms us into something that goes far beyond our being people who merely put up with each other. Listen to what the Lord says: *Vos autem dixi amicos!* We are his friends who, like him, give our lives for each other, when heroism is needed and throughout our ordinary lives.
- 751** How do we suppose that people who do not have our faith can come to the Holy Church if they see the unhandsome way in which those who call themselves followers of Christ treat each other?



**752** Your agreeable behaviour should become more attractive by improving in kind and intensity. Otherwise, your apostolate will die out in lifeless and inward-looking circles.

**753** Through your friendship and doctrine – or rather, through charity and the message of Christ – you will move many non-Catholics to help in earnest and to do good to all men.

**754** Take note of the words of that working man who commented so enthusiastically after he had attended a gathering you had organised: “I had never heard people speak as they do here, about being noble, honest, kind and generous...” And he concluded in amazement: “Compared to the materialism of the Left or the Right, this is the true revolution.”

—Any soul can understand the fraternity Christ has established. Let us make a point of not adulterating that doctrine.

**755** Sometimes you try to excuse yourself, saying that you are distracted or

absent-minded, or that it is your character to be dry and reserved. That, you add, is why you don't even know very well the people you live with.

—Listen, isn't it true that this excuse doesn't really satisfy you?

**756** I advised you to inject a great deal of supernatural outlook into every detail of your ordinary life. And I added immediately that living with other people provided you with ample opportunity throughout the day.

**757** Practising charity means respecting other people's way of thinking. It means rejoicing at their road to God, without trying to make them think like you or joining you.

It occurred to me to put this consideration to you. These other ways are different, but parallel; each person will reach God by following his own way. Don't get sidetracked in comparisons, or in wanting to know who is higher. That does not matter; what does matter is that we should all attain the end.

**758** You say that he is full of defects! Very well... but, apart from the fact that people who are perfect are found only in Heaven, you too have defects, yet others put up with you and, what is more, appreciate you. That is because they love you with the love Jesus Christ had for his own, and they had a fair number of shortcomings.

—Learn from this!

**759** You complain that he shows you no understanding. I am certain he does as much as he can to try to understand you. But what about you? When will you make a bit of an effort to understand *him*?

**760** All right, I agree! That person has behaved badly; his behaviour has been reprehensible and unworthy; he shows no merit at all.

—Humanly speaking he deserves to be utterly despised, you added.

—I understand what you mean, I can assure you, but I do not share this concluding view of yours. That life which seems so mean is sacred. Christ has died to

save it. If He did not despise it, how can you dare to?

**761** If your friendship is brought down to such a level that you become an accomplice in the wretched behaviour of others, it will have been reduced to a sad confederacy which deserves no esteem whatsoever.

**762** It is true that life, which by its nature is already rather narrow and uncertain, sometimes becomes difficult. —But that will help you to become more supernatural and to see the hand of God. Then you will be more human and understanding with those around you.

**763** Forbearance is proportional to authority. A simple judge has to condemn — even if he takes into account extenuating circumstances — the convicted criminal who has admitted being guilty. The sovereign power of the country may sometimes grant a pardon or amnesty. God always forgives a contrite soul.

**764** “Through you I have seen God, who

has forgotten my follies and my offences, and has welcomed me with the affection of a Father." This is what a contrite prodigal son of the twentieth century wrote to his family when he returned to his father's house.

**765** It has cost you a lot to begin getting rid of those niggling worries and forgetting about those personal things you were looking forward to. They may have been few and not very splendid, but they were deeply rooted. —In exchange, you are sure now that you are interested and concerned about your brothers, and only about them, for you have learned to discover Jesus Christ in your neighbour.

**766** "A hundredfold!" How you remembered a few days ago that promise of the Lord!

—In the fraternity that is lived among your companions in the apostolate, I assure you, you will find that hundredfold.

**767** How many fears and dangers can be allayed by the true love among brothers,

which is not mentioned, for then it would seem to be profaned, but which shines in every little detail.

**768** Have recourse to the Blessed Virgin every day with complete confidence. Your soul and your life will feel comforted at once. —She will let you partake of the treasures she keeps in her heart, for “never has it been known that anyone who sought her protection was left unaided.”

## THE WILL

**769** To advance in interior life and apostolate, you do not need devotion that you can feel, but a definite and generous disposition of the will to respond to what God asks of you.

**770** Without the Lord you will not be able to take one sure step forward. —This conviction that you need his help will lead you to be more united to him, with a strong, enduring confidence, accompanied by joy and peace, even though the road might become hard and steep.

**771** Look at the great difference between the natural and the supernatural way of acting. The first begins well, but later ends

up slackening. The latter begins equally well... and later struggles to become even better.

**772** It is not at all bad to behave well for upright human reasons. –But... what a difference it makes when the supernatural ones *rule*!

**773** When he saw the happiness with which that hard work was being done, that friend asked: “Is it through enthusiasm that you get all these tasks done?” –And they answered him happily and calmly: “Through enthusiasm...? That would be the day! *Per Dominum Nostrum Iesum Christum!* – through Our Lord Jesus Christ, who is constantly awaiting us.”

**774** The world is waiting for us to wake up those who are asleep, to encourage the timid, to guide those who have lost their way; in other words, for us to enrol them in the ranks of Christ, so that such a lot of energy is not lost.

**775** Perhaps you too might find it helpful



to make use of this reminder of supernatural things which shows all the sensitivity of willing love. It was what a soul very much given to God used to repeat when he was faced by the various demands made on him. "It is high time to make up your mind in earnest to do something worthwhile."

**776** What sort of Christian perfection do you expect to achieve, if you are only following your whims and doing "what you like"? All your defects, unless you fight against them, will naturally produce bad works as their constant fruit. And your will, untempered by a persevering fight, will be of no use to you when a difficult occasion arises.

**777** The appearance is that of strength and resilience. —But how much softness and lack of willpower there is within!

—You must hold to your determination not to let your virtues become fancy dress but clothes which define your character.

**778** "I know some men and women who don't even have the strength to ask for help", you tell me with sorrow and disappointment. – Don't leave them in the lurch. Your desire to save yourself and them can be the starting point for their conversion. Furthermore, if you think about it carefully you will realise that someone also had to lend you a hand.

**779** Soft people who complain about a thousand silly trivialities are the ones who do not know how to sacrifice themselves for Jesus... in those daily trifles – let alone sacrifice themselves for others.

What a shame if your behaviour – which is so hard and demanding with other people! – should show the same softness in your daily life!

**780** You suffer a lot because you realise that you don't make the grade. You would like to do more, and do it more effectively, but very often you do things in a complete daze, or you don't dare do them at all.

*Contra spem, in spem!* – live in certain hope, against all hope. Rely on that

firm rock which will save you and help you on. It is a wonderful theological virtue, which will encourage you to press on, without being afraid of going too far, and will not let you stop.

—Don't look so troubled! *Yes*, cultivating hope means strengthening the will.

**781** Whenever your will weakens in your ordinary work, you must recall these thoughts: "Study, work, is an essential part of my way. If I were discredited professionally as a consequence of my laziness it would make my work as a Christian useless or impossible. To attract and to help others, I need the influence of my professional reputation, and that is what God wants."

—Never doubt that if you abandon your task, you are going away from God's plans and leading others away from them!

**782** You were scared of following the way of the children of God, for in the name of the Lord you were urged to do your duty, to deny yourself and climb down from your ivory tower. You excused yourself from taking part... and I admit that

I do not find it at all strange that you should now feel that weight which is oppressing you: a set of complexes and twisted complications, of inhibitions and scruples, which leaves you useless.

Don't be annoyed with me if I tell you that you have behaved with less courage than depraved people, who boldly propagate evil, as if you were worse or lower than them.

*Surge et ambula!* – get up and walk. Make up your mind! You can still get rid of that evil dead weight if you listen with the grace of God to what he is asking, and, above all, if you do it fully and wholeheartedly!

**783** It is good that your soul should be eaten up by that impatience. –But don't be in a hurry. God wants you to prepare yourself seriously, taking all the months or years necessary, and is counting on your decision to do so.

–With good reason did that king say: “Time and I against any two.”

**784** This is how a right-minded man

summarised jealousy or envy: "They must be very ill-intentioned to want to stir up such clean waters."

**785** You ask if you have to remain silent and inactive... –In the face of unjust aggression against a just law, the answer is: *No!*

**786** Every day you are becoming more 'crazy'... –It is noticeable in the wonderful self-assurance and confidence that knowing you are working for Christ has given you.

–Sacred Scripture has already proclaimed it: *Vir fidelis multum laudabitur* – the faithful man merits praise from all.

**787** You have never felt so absolutely free as you do now that your freedom is interwoven with love and detachment, with security and insecurity; for you do not trust yourself at all, but trust in God for everything.

**788** Have you seen how water is stored in reservoirs against a time of drought...? In the same way, to achieve the even charact-

er that you need in times of difficulty, you have to store up cheerfulness, clear insights and the light which the Lord sends you.

**789** As the flames of your first enthusiasm die down, it becomes difficult to advance in the dark. –But that progress is all the more reliable for being hard. And then, when you least expect it, the darkness vanishes, and the enthusiasm and light return. Persevere!

**790** God wants his children to be on the offensive. –We cannot just ‘wait and see’. Our business is to fight, wherever we may be, as an army in battle array.

**791** It is not a matter of fulfilling your obligations in a hurry, but of bringing them to a finish without a pause, at God’s pace.

**792** You have the agreeable manner of an intelligent conversationalist... But you are also very apathetic. “Nobody has come to look for me” is your excuse.

–Let me be more specific: if you don’t change and seek out those who are

waiting for you, you will never be an effective apostle.

**793** There are three extremely important things you need to do to draw people to God. Forget yourself, and think only of the glory of your Father God. Subject your will filially to the Will of Heaven, as Jesus Christ taught you. Follow with docility the lights of the Holy Spirit.

**794** Mary spent three days and three nights looking for the Son who was lost. May you and I also be able to say that our willingness to find Jesus knows no rest.

## THE HEART

**795** To be happy, what you need is not an easy life but a heart which is in love.

**796** After twenty centuries, we have to proclaim with complete conviction that the spirit of Christ has not lost its redemptive force, which alone can satisfy the desires of the human heart. —Begin by feeding that truth into your own heart, which will be perpetually restless, as Saint Augustine wrote, for as long as you don't place it entirely in God.

**797** To love is... to cherish but one thought, to live for the person loved, not to belong to oneself, to be happily and freely, with one's heart and soul, subjected to



another's will... and at the same time to one's own.

**798** You still do not love the Lord as a miser loves his riches, as a mother loves her child... You are still too concerned about yourself and about your petty affairs! And yet you have noticed that Jesus has already become indispensable in your life...

—Well, as soon as you correspond completely to his call, he will also be indispensable to you in each one of your actions.

**799** Cry aloud — for that cry is the folly of one in love: “Lord, even though I love you... don’t trust me! Bind me to yourself, more closely every day!”

**800** Don’t doubt it: the heart has been created to love. Let us therefore bring Our Lord Jesus Christ into all the love that we feel. Otherwise, the empty heart takes revenge and fills itself up with the most despicable vileness.

**801** There is no heart more human than

that of a person overflowing with supernatural sense. Think of Holy Mary, who is full of grace, Daughter of God the Father, Mother of God the Son, Spouse of God the Holy Spirit. Her Heart has room for all humanity and makes no distinction or discrimination. —Every person is her son or her daughter.

**802** When someone has a very small heart, it seems as if he keeps his desires in a narrow, neglected drawer.

**803** Each day you must behave to those around you with great understanding, with great affection, together, of course, with all the energy needed. Otherwise understanding and affection become complicity and selfishness.

**804** That friend of ours with no false humility used to say: “I haven’t needed to learn how to forgive, because the Lord has taught me how to love.”

**805** Forgiveness. To forgive with one’s whole heart and with no trace of a grudge

Otherwise, we should fall short of corresponding to his Love.

**810** It distresses me to see those who have given themselves to God giving the impression that they are old bachelors, or allowing themselves to be taken for such, since they possess the Love beyond all loves. –They would be old bachelors indeed if they did not know how to love the One who loves so much.

**811** Someone has compared the heart to a windmill, moved by the wind of love, of passion...

Indeed, that “windmill” can grind wheat, barley or dried dung. –It is up to us!

**812** The devil, father of lies and victim of his own pride, tries to imitate the Lord even in the way he seeks converts. Have you noticed that in the same way as God makes use of men to save souls and lead them to holiness, so does satan use other people to impede that work and even to bring them to ruin? And – don’t be frightened – in the same way as Jesus seeks those who were

nearest, relatives, friends or colleagues to be instruments, the devil also often attempts to get the people we love most to lead us into evil.

That is why, if the bonds of blood-relationship tie us down and hinder us from following the ways of God, we should cut them promptly. And perhaps your resolve will also release others who were being entangled in the nets of Lucifer.

**813** I give you thanks, my Jesus, for your decision to become perfect Man, with a Heart which loved and is most lovable; which loved unto death and suffered; which was filled with joy and sorrow; which delighted in the things of men and showed us the way to Heaven; which subjected itself heroically to duty and acted with mercy; which watched over the poor and the rich and cared for sinners and the just...

—I give you thanks, my Jesus. Give us hearts to measure up to Yours!

**814** Ask Jesus to grant you a Love like a purifying furnace, where your poor flesh — your poor heart — may be consumed and

cleansed of all earthly miseries. Pray that it may be emptied of self and filled with him. Ask him to grant you a deep-seated aversion to all that is worldly so that you may be sustained only by Love.

**815** You have seen very clearly your vocation to love God, but only with your head. You assure me that you have put your heart into the way you are following. But you say that you are distracted at times, and even attempt to look back. That is a sign that you have not completely put your heart into it. You need to be more sensitive!

**816** The Master said: "I have come to set a man at variance with his father, and the daughter with her mother, and the daughter-in-law with her mother-in-law..." If you fulfil what he demands of you, you will show you really love them. That is why you must not use the whole-hearted affection you should have for them as a shield when the moment comes for personal sacrifice. Otherwise, believe me, you will be putting love for your parents before the

**821** Sometimes it is a duty to feel annoyed; sometimes it is a weakness. But let it last only for a few minutes. Moreover, make sure there is always charity there: affection!

**822** You may often have to tell someone off... But you should be teaching him how to correct a defect, never merely giving vent to your bad temper.

**823** When you need to correct someone, it should be done clearly and with kindness, even with a smile if that is suitable. It should never, or very seldom, be overpowering.

**824** Do you feel as if goodness and absolute truth have been deposited with you, and therefore that you have been invested with a personal title or right to uproot evil at all costs?

—You will never solve anything like that, but only through Love and with love, remembering that Love has forgiven you and still forgives you so much!

**825** Love good people because they love

Christ... -Love those too who do not love him, because of this misfortune, and especially because Christ loves both kinds of people.

**826** The people of that land, so far away from God and lost, reminded you of the Master's words: "They are like sheep without a shepherd."

-And you too were filled with a strong feeling of compassion deep within you... Make up your mind, where you are now, to give your life as a holocaust for all.

**827** A friend of ours used to say: "The poor are my best spiritual book and the main motive of my prayers. It pains me to see them, and in each one of them, Christ. And because it hurts, I realise I love him and love them."

**828** If the love of God is put into friendships, they are cleansed, reinforced and spiritualised, because all the dross, all the selfish points of view and excessively worldly considerations are burned away. Never forget that the love of God puts our



affections in order, and purifies them without diminishing them.

**829** The thought of what has happened to you burns within you. Christ came to you when you were only a miserable leper! Until then, you had developed only one good quality, a generous concern for others. After that encounter you were given the grace to see Jesus in them, you fell in love with him, and now you love him in them... Now the altruism that used to impel you to help your neighbour in certain ways seems very small. You are right to think so!

**830** Get accustomed to entrusting your poor heart to the Sweet and Immaculate Heart of Mary, so that she may purify it from so much dross, and lead it to the Most Sacred and Most Merciful Heart of Jesus.



## PURITY

**831** For everyone, whatever his state — single, married, widowed or priest — chastity is a triumphant affirmation of love.

**832** The “miracle” of purity has prayer and mortification as its two points of support.

**833** A temptation against chastity is more dangerous the more concealed it is. When it comes insidiously, it is all the more deceptive.

—Do not give in, not even with the excuse of not wanting to “seem strange”!

**834** Holy Purity is the humility of the flesh! You asked the Lord for seven bolts

on your heart. And I advised you to ask for seven bolts for your heart and eighty years of gravity as well, for your youth...

And be watchful, for a spark is much easier to extinguish than a fire. Take flight... for in this it is low cowardice to be "brave"; a roving eye... does not mean a lively spirit, but turns out to be a snare of satan.

Yet human diligence, with mortification, the cilice, disciplines and fasting are all worthless without you, my God!

**835** This is how a confessor killed concupiscence in a sensitive soul who confessed to a certain curiosity: "Nonsense! It is just a question of male and female instincts."

**836** As soon as you wilfully allow a dialogue with temptation to begin, the soul is robbed of its peace, just as consent to impurity destroys grace.

**837** He followed the way of impurity with all his body... and with all his soul. —His faith became obscured... even though he knew it is not a problem of faith.

**838** “You told me, Father, that after my past life it is still possible to become *another* Saint Augustine. I don’t doubt it, and today more than yesterday I want to try to prove it.”

But you have to cut out sin courageously from the root, as the holy Bishop of Hippo did.

**839** Yes, ask for pardon with contrition and do penance in abundance for the impure events of your past life, but don’t try to recall them.

**840** That conversation... was as dirty as a sewer!

—It is not enough for you to take no part in it. You must show your repugnance for it strongly!

**841** It seems as if the “spirit” were growing smaller, shrinking to a little point... And the body seems to grow and become gigantic, until it gains control. —It was for you that Saint Paul wrote: “I buffet my own body, and make it my slave; or I, who have preached to others, may myself

be rejected as worthless."

**842** One feels sorry for people who say from their own sad experience that you cannot be chaste while living and working in the middle of the world!

—If they accepted the consequences of their illogical reasoning, they ought not to feel hurt if others were to insult the memory of their parents, brothers or sisters, wife or husband.

**843** That confessor was a bit rough, but he was experienced and contained the ravings of a soul and brought them to order. He brought him to his senses by saying: "The way you are now means you are going the ways of cows; next you will be content to go the way of goats; and then... always like an animal which doesn't know how to look up to heaven."

**844** Perhaps you are... just what you are, a little animal. —But you must admit that there are people of integrity who are chaste. Well, don't get upset then, if they leave you out of things. Those men and

women include in their human plans people with a body and a soul, not animals.

**845** Some people bring children into the world for their own benefit, to serve their own purposes, out of selfishness... They forget children are a wonderful gift from God for which they will have to render a very special account.

Do not be offended if I say that having offspring just to continue the species, is something that... animals can do too.

**846** No Christian married couple can want to block the well-springs of life. For their love is based on the Love of Christ, which entails dedication and sacrifice... Moreover, as Tobias reminded Sara, a husband and wife know that "we are children of saints, and we cannot come together in the way of the gentiles, who do not know God."

**847** When we were little, we kept close to our mother in a dark alley or if dogs barked at us.

Now, when we feel temptations of the flesh, we should run to the side of Our Mother in Heaven, by realising how close she is to us, and by means of aspirations.

—She will defend us and lead us to the light.

**848** No one is more of a man or more of a woman for leading a disordered life.

Obviously anyone who thinks so would find their ideal of a person in a prostitute, or someone who was perverted and corrupt — that is in those who have rotten hearts and cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

**849** May I give you some advice for you to put into practice daily? When your heart makes you feel those low cravings, say slowly to the Immaculate Virgin: Look on me with compassion. Don't abandon me, my Mother! —And recommend this prayer to others.

## PEACE

**850** In your heart and soul, in your intelligence and in your will, implant a spirit of trust and abandonment to the loving Will of your heavenly Father... –From this will arise the interior peace you desire.

**851** How can you be at peace if you allow passions you do not even attempt to control to drag you away from the “pull” of grace?

Heaven pulls you upwards; you – only you, and don’t seek excuses! – downwards... –If you go on like that you will tear yourself apart.

**852** We have both peace and war within us.

Victory and peace cannot be attained if loyalty and resolve to win the combat are lacking.

**853** There is a remedy for those anxieties of yours. Be patient, have rectitude of intention and look at things from a supernatural perspective.

**854** God is with you! So cast far away from you that fear and spiritual agitation... They are reactions to avoid in the first place, for they only serve to multiply temptations and increase the danger.

**855** Everything may collapse and fail. Events may turn out contrary to what was expected and great adversity may come. But nothing is to be gained by being perturbed. Furthermore, remember the confident prayer of the prophet: "The Lord is our judge, the Lord gives us our laws, the Lord is our king; it is he who will save us."

—Say it devoutly every day, so that your behaviour may agree with the designs of Providence, which governs us for our own good.



**856** If you fix your sight on God and thus know how to keep calm in the face of worries; if you can forget petty things, grudges and envies, you will save a lot of energy, which you need if you are to work effectively in the service of men.

**857** Someone we know well told us sincerely, in confidence, that he had never been bored, for he had never been on his own, without our Friend.

—It was late in the evening, and there was a great silence... You felt very intently the presence of God... And, in the knowledge of that reality, what peace!

**858** One day when you were travelling, a hearty greeting from a brother reminded you that the honest ways of the world are open to Christ. It is just a matter of launching out on them with the spirit of conquerors.

If God has created the world for his children, for them to live in and sanctify, what are you waiting for?

**859** You are extraordinarily happy.

Sometimes you may find out that God has been abandoned by a son of his. Then, in the midst of the peace and joy deep within you, you feel a pang of grief and a sorrow which arises from affection, but you do not allow it really to disturb or upset you.

—All right, but... make sure you use all human and supernatural resources available to help him change his mind. And you must trust fully in Jesus Christ! If you do, the waters will return to their course.

**860** As soon as you truly abandon yourself in the Lord, you will know how to be content with whatever happens. You will not lose your peace if your undertakings do not turn out the way you hoped, even if you have put everything into them, and used all the means necessary. For they will have “turned out” the way God wants them to.

**861** Your forgetfulness and your faults are still there, and they hurt you. At the same time, you go on your way bursting with happiness.

Precisely because they cause you the

pain of love, your failings no longer rob you of your peace.

**862** When darkness surrounds us and our soul is blind and restless, we have to go to the Light, like Bartimaeus. Repeat, shout, cry out ever more strongly, *Domine, ut videam!* – Lord, that I may see... And daylight will dawn upon you, and you will be able to enjoy the brightness He grants you.

**863** Fight against your harshness of character, against your selfishness, your spirit of comfort and your dislikes... We have to be co-redeemers; and, besides, consider carefully that the prize you receive will bear a very direct relation to the sowing you may have done.

**864** The task for a Christian is to drown evil in an abundance of good. It is not a question of negative campaigns, or of being *anti* anything. On the contrary, we should live positively, full of optimism, with youthfulness, joy and peace. We should be understanding with everybody, with the followers of Christ and with those who

abandon him, or do not know him at all.

—But understanding does not mean holding back, or remaining indifferent, but being active.

**865** Through Christian charity and human good manners, you should make an effort not to create an unbridgeable distance between you and anybody else... You should leave a way out for others, so that they need go no further from the Truth.

**866** Violence is not a good method for convincing anyone... Even less is it so in the apostolate.

**867** A violent person always stands to lose, even though he may win the first battle... for he ends up isolated and hedged around by his lack of understanding.

**868** The tactics of a tyrant towards those who could overthrow him if they were united are to make them quarrel among themselves. —It is an old ploy of the enemy, the devil and his followers, to destroy many apostolic plans.

**869** Those... who see adversaries where there are only brothers, deny with their works the Christianity they profess.

**870** Matters can rarely be resolved by aggressive polemics which humiliate people. And things are certainly never cleared up when among those arguing the case there is a fanatic.

**871** I can't understand why you are annoyed and disappointed. They paid you back in your own currency, delighting in insults by word and deeds.

Learn from the lesson and never forget from now on that the people who live with you have a heart too.

**872** To help you keep your peace during those times of hard and unjust contradictions I used to say to you: "If they break our skulls, we shall not take it too seriously. We shall just have to put up with having them broken."

**873** A paradox: I have had fewer worries on my mind every day since I decided to

follow the advice of the psalm: "Cast your cares upon the Lord, and he will sustain you." And at the same time, once we have done whatever needs doing, everything can be solved more easily!

**874** Holy Mary is the Queen of peace, and thus the Church invokes her. So when your soul or your family are troubled, or things go wrong at work, in society or between nations, cry out to her without ceasing. Call to her by this title: *Regina pacis, ora pro nobis* – Queen of peace, pray for us. Have you at least tried it when you have lost your calm?... –You will be surprised at its immediate effect.

## BEYOND DEATH

**875** A true Christian is always ready to appear before God. Because, if he is fighting to live as a man of Christ, he is ready at every moment to fulfil his duty.

**876** When facing death, be calm! I do not want you to have the cold stoicism of the pagan, but the fervour of a child of God who knows that life is changed, not taken away. —Dying?... Living!

**877** He acquired a Doctorate in law and in philosophy, and was applying for a post as a professor at the University of Madrid. He had specialised in two demanding subjects and had done brilliantly in both. He sent word to me: he was ill, and wanted



me to go and see him. I arrived at the lodgings where he was staying. He greeted me with the words: "Father, I am dying." I comforted him affectionately. He wished to make a general confession. That very same night, he died.

An architect and a doctor helped me dress the corpse. —Seeing that young body, which soon began to decompose... the three of us agreed that two university qualifications were worth nothing compared to the definitive qualification which as a good Christian he had just obtained.

**878** Everything can be put right... except death. And death puts everything right.

**879** Death comes and cannot be avoided. What empty vanity it is, then, to centre our existence on this life. See how much many men and women suffer. Some suffer because life is coming to an end and it pains them to leave it; others because it is going on, and they are sick of it... In neither case is there room for the mistaken view that makes our passage through this world an end in itself.



One must leave that way of thinking behind and anchor oneself to another, an eternal one. A total change is required, to empty oneself of self-centred motives, which pass away, and to be renewed in Christ, who is eternal.

**880** When you think about death, do not be afraid, in spite of your sins...For he already knows that you love him... and what stuff you are made of.

—If you seek him, he will welcome you as the father welcomed the prodigal son; but you have to seek him!

**881** *Non habemus hic manentem civitatem* — our definitive home is not to be found on this earth. —And so that we don't forget it, at the hour of death this truth appears crudely at times, in lack of understanding, say, or in persecution or in being despised. —But there is always a sense of loneliness, for even though we may be surrounded by affection, every person dies alone.

—Now is the time to untie all the bonds that bind us! Let us prepare

ourselves at all times for that step which will bring us into the eternal presence of the Most Holy Trinity.

**882** Time is our treasure, the “money” with which to buy eternity.

**883** You were consoled by the idea that life is to be spent, burned in the service of God. —And spending ourselves entirely for him is how we shall be freed from death, which brings us the possession of Life.

**884** That priest, a friend of ours, worked away while thinking of God, holding on to his paternal hand and helping others to make these fundamental ideas their own. That is why he said to himself: “When you die, all will be well, because He will continue to look after things.”

**885** Don’t make a tragedy out of death, for it is not one. Only unloving children do not look forward to meeting their parents.

**886** Everything down here is a handful of dust. Consider the millions of “important”

people who have “recently” died and nobody remembers at all.

**887** The great Christian revolution has been to convert pain into fruitful suffering and to turn a bad thing into something good. We have deprived the devil of this weapon; and with it we conquer eternity.

**888** Dreadful will the judgement appear for those who knew the way perfectly well, showed it to others or demanded that they should follow it, but would not go along it themselves.

—God will judge and condemn them out of their own mouths.

**889** Purgatory shows God’s great mercy and washes away the defects of those who long to become one with Him.

**890** Hell alone is a punishment for sin. Death and judgement are only consequences, which those who are in the grace of God do not fear.

**891** If at any time you feel uneasy at the

thought of our sister death because you see yourself to be such a poor creature, take heart. Heaven awaits us and consider: what will it be like when all the infinite beauty and greatness, and happiness and Love of God will be poured into the poor clay vessel that the human being is, to satisfy it eternally with the freshness of an ever new joy?

**892** When encountering the bitter injustice of this life, how the honest soul rejoices remembering the eternal Justice of its eternal God!

—With the knowledge of its own wretchedness, it utters with a fruitful desire that Pauline exclamation: *Non vivo ego* — it's not me living now! It's Christ who lives in me! And He will live for ever.

**893** How happy when they die must be those who have lived heroically every minute of their life! —I can assure you it is so, because I have seen the joy of those who have prepared themselves for many years, with calm impatience, for this encounter.

**894** Pray that none of us may fail the Lord. —It will not be difficult, unless we play the fool. For Our Father God helps us in everything, even by making this our exile on earth last for only a while.

**895** The thought of death will help you to grow in the virtue of charity, for it might be that this particular instant in which you are together with one person or another is the last one... They, or you, or I, could be gone at any moment.

**896** A soul who was ambitious to be united with God used to say: "Fortunately, we men are not eternal!"

**897** That piece of information made me think: fifty-one million people die every year; ninety-seven every minute. The Master had already told us when he said: the fisherman throws his nets into the sea; the Kingdom of Heaven is like a drag-net... and from the catch the good will be selected; the bad, those that are of no use, will be rejected for ever! Fifty-one million people die every year, ninety-seven every

minute. Tell other people as well.

**898** Our Mother went up to Heaven, body and soul. Tell her often that we, her children, do not want to be separated from her... She will hear you!

## THE TONGUE

**899** Having the gift of tongues is knowing how to transmit the knowledge of God – an invaluable resource for whoever is to be an apostle. –That is why I ask God Our Lord each day to grant it to every one of his sons and daughters.

**900** Learn how to say *No*, without hurting people unnecessarily or having recourse to the kind of abrupt rejection which destroys charity.

–Remember that you are always in the presence of God!

**901** Do you object to my repeating in the same way the same essential things without taking into account the latest fashionable

trends? –Look, a straight line has been defined in the same way for centuries, because it is the clearest and briefest definition. Other definitions would be more obscure and complicated.

**902** Acquire the habit of speaking about everyone and about everything they do in a friendly manner, especially when you are speaking of those who labour in God's service.

Whenever that is not possible, *keep quiet*. Sharp or irritated comment as well may border on gossip or slander.

**903** A young man who had just given himself more fully to God said: "What I need to do now is speak less, visit the sick and sleep on the floor."

–Apply that to yourself.

**904** One should speak about Christ's priests only in order to praise them.

–I hope with all my heart that my brothers and I bear this in mind in our daily behaviour.



**905** There are many sides to lying: reticence, intrigue, slander... But it is always the coward's weapon.

**906** You are wrong to let yourself be impressed by the first or the latest conversation!

Listen with respect and interest. Give due credit to people... but carefully ponder your judgement in the presence of God.

**907** They spread slander and then make sure themselves that someone comes along immediately to tell you: "*It is said that...*" No doubt that is villainous, but don't lose your peace; the tongue can do you no harm, if you work honestly. Consider how silly they are, how tactless, humanly speaking, and what a lack of loyalty they show towards their brothers – and especially towards God!

And don't go and fall into slander yourself, through an ill-conceived idea of the right to reply. If you have to say anything, make use of fraternal correction as the Gospel advises us.

**908** Don't be worried by those contradictions and all that talk. It is true that we are working in a divine undertaking, but we are men... And it is natural that as we walk we raise dust along the road.

If anything bothers you or hurts you... make use of it for your purification and, if necessary, to straighten out your own behaviour.

**909** Gossip is a very human thing, they say. —And I reply: we have to live in a divine manner.

The evil or flippant word of only one man can create a climate of opinion, and even make it fashionable to speak badly about somebody... Then that thin mist of slander rises from below, reaches a high level and perhaps condenses into black clouds.

—But when the man persecuted in this way is a soul of God, the clouds shower down a beneficial rain, come what may; and the Lord ensures that he is exalted by the very means with which they tried to humiliate or defame him.

**910** You didn't want to believe it, but you had to yield to the evidence, to your cost. Those statements you made simply and with a sound Catholic sense have been twisted maliciously by enemies of the faith.

It is true that "we have to be simple as doves... and wise as serpents." Don't talk at the wrong time or out of place.

**911** Because you don't know, or don't want to know, how to imitate that man's upright manner of acting, your secret envy makes you seek to ridicule him.

**912** Speaking badly of others is the daughter of envy; and envy is where the sterile seek refuge.

So, now you are faced by sterility, examine the way you see things. If you carry on working and do not get annoyed at others who are also working and obtaining results, then the sterility of your effort will merely be an apparent one. In time you will gather the harvest.

**913** Some people seem to think that when they are not causing harm or

mortifying others they are at a loose end.

**914** Sometimes I think backbiters are like men possessed by a lesser devil... —For the devil always insinuates himself and his evil spirit here, forever critical of God or God's followers.

**915** “Stupidities!”, you say looking down on them.

—Do you know them personally? You don't? —Then, how can you speak of what you do not know?

**916** This is how you should answer a back-biter: “I shall tell the person concerned” or “I shall speak to him about it”.

**917** A contemporary author has written: “Going around gossiping is always inhuman; it reveals a person of mediocre quality; it is a sign of being uneducated; it shows a lack of refinement of feeling; it is unworthy of a Christian.”

**918** You should always avoid complaining, criticising, gossiping... You must avoid

absolutely anything that could bring discord among brothers.

**919** Having a position of high authority, you would be imprudent to interpret the silence of those who listen to you as a sign of acquiescence. Ask yourself whether you allow them to make suggestions, or whether you take offence if they actually let you know what they think. —You must change your ways.

**920** This has to be your attitude when faced by defamation. First, forgive everyone from the very beginning and with all your heart. —Then love. Never fall into a single uncharitable act. Always respond with love!

—But if your Mother the Church is being attacked, defend her courageously. Keep calm, but be firm. Have the strength not to give in, and prevent anyone fouling up or blocking the way ahead for Christian souls when they in their turn are eager to forgive and respond with charity to personal insults.

**921** Someone who was tired of people gossiping said that he wished the smallest village were like the capital.

—He didn't know, poor man, that it is the same there.

—For the love of God and your neighbour, don't fall into such a small-town defect... It is so un-Christian. —It was said of the first followers of Christ: "See how they love one another." Can this be said of you, and of me, at all times?

**922** Criticisms of apostolic enterprises are usually of two kinds: the work is presented by some people as a most complicated structure; others deem it to be a comfortable and easy task.

In the end, such "objectivity" boils down to narrow-mindedness, with a good dose of idle chatter thrown in. —Don't get annoyed, but ask them: "What is it that *you* do?"

**923** You might not be able to expect understanding for the demands of your faith, but you do have to ask for respect.

**924** Those people you heard speak ill of that loyal friend of God, will also speak ill of you when you decide to behave better.

**925** Certain comments can hurt only those who consider themselves to be affected. That is why, once you are following the Lord with all your heart and soul, you can accept criticisms as purification, and as a goad to make you lengthen your stride.

**926** The Most Holy Trinity has crowned Our Mother.

—God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, will ask us to render an account of every idle word. That is another reason for asking Holy Mary to teach us always to speak in the presence of the Lord.

## SPREADING THE FAITH

**927** Be convinced of this: your apostolate consists in spreading goodness, light, enthusiasm, generosity, a spirit of sacrifice, constancy in work, deep study, complete self-surrender, being up-to-date, cheerful and complete obedience to the Church, and perfect charity.

—Nobody can give what he does not have.

**928** This advice is for you, since you are still young and have just started along your way. As God deserves everything, try to be outstanding professionally, so that you will later be able to spread your ideas more effectively.

**929** Don't forget that we will be more



convincing the more convinced we are.

**930** “Nor do men light a lamp and put it under a bushel, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.”

And at the end of his time upon earth, Christ commanded: *Euntes docete* – go out and teach. He wants his light to shine in the behaviour and words of his disciples, and in yours too.

**931** It is surprising how often, even in the name of freedom, many people fear and oppose Catholics being simply good Catholics.

**932** Be on guard against the propagators of scandal and innuendo, which some take in through lack of reflection while others do so through bad faith. They destroy a calm atmosphere and poison public opinion.

Sometimes true charity demands that such abuses and their promoters should be denounced. Otherwise, with their devious or badly-formed consciences, they or those

who listen to them could think: "They keep quiet, so they must agree."

**933** Sectarians protest loudly against what they call "our fanaticism" because the centuries go by and the Catholic Faith remains immutable.

On the other hand, the fanaticism of the sectarians, since it bears no relation to the truth, changes its coat at different times. They raise against the Holy Church a bogey of mere words lacking in any factual content. Their "freedom" enchains men; their "progress" leads humanity back to the jungle; their "science" conceals ignorance. Behind their stall are hidden only old damaged goods.

May such "fanaticism" for the Faith as yours is become stronger every day, for it is the sole defence of the one Truth.

**934** Do not be afraid, or surprised, to see the resistance of some people's minds. There will always be foolish people who, displaying their culture, brandish the weapon of their ignorance.

**935** How sad it is to realise that those who hate the Lord march arm-in-arm with some who claim they are in his service. They follow different passions, but are united against Christians, the children of God.

**936** In certain surroundings, especially in the intellectual sphere, one sees and feels a sort of conspiracy of "cliques", not infrequently assisted even by Catholics. With cynical perseverance they maintain and spread slanders to cast a shadow over the Church, or over certain individuals and organisations within it. All this is done against all truth or reason.

Pray each day with faith: "*Ut inimicos Sanctae Ecclesiae*" – enemies, because that is what they proclaim themselves to be – "*humiliare digneris, te rogamus audi nos.*" Confound, Lord, those who persecute you, with the clarity of your light, which we are ready to spread.

**937** Is the idea of Catholicism old and therefore unacceptable? –The sun is older and has not lost its light; water is more ancient, and it still quenches the thirst and

refreshes us.

**938** No one, even with a good intention, should be allowed to falsify historical or biographical facts. —But it is a great mistake to put on a pedestal enemies of the Church who have spent their days persecuting her. Be sure of this: historical truth does not suffer because a Christian does not wish to collaborate in the construction of a pedestal which should not exist. Since when is hatred to be set up as a model?

**939** The spreading of Christian teaching need not provoke antagonism, or harm those who do not know our doctrine. *Caritas omnia suffert!* — love bears all things. If one proceeds with charity, anyone who might otherwise have been opposed to Christianity and been deceived by error may easily and honestly end up committing himself to it. —However, there can be no giving ground in dogma in the name of a naive “breadth of belief”, for if anyone acted in this way he would risk putting himself out of the Church. Instead of winning a benefit for others he would harm himself.

**940** Christianity is "unusual"; it does not sit easily with the things of this world. And that is perhaps its greatest "nuisance value" when it is used as a banner by the worldly.

**941** Some people know nothing about God... because no one has talked to them about him in terms they can understand.

**942** Pray that your holy ingenuity may achieve what your intelligence cannot attain, so that you may give more service of a better kind to everyone.

**943** Believe me, the apostolate of giving doctrine usually has to be, as it were, capillary, spreading from one to another, from each believer to his immediate companion.

The children of God care about all souls, because every soul is important.

**944** Seek refuge with the Blessed Virgin, Mother of Good Counsel, so that your lips may never utter any offence against God.

## RESPONSIBILITY

**945** If we Christians really lived in accordance with our faith, the greatest revolution of all times would take place. The effectiveness of our co-redemption depends on each one of us! –You should meditate on this.

**946** You will feel completely responsible when you realise that, before God, you have only duties. He already sees to it that you are granted rights!

**947** May you acquire the custom of concerning yourself every day about others, and give yourself to the task so much that you forget you even exist!

**948** Here is a thought to help you in difficult moments. "The more my faithfulness increases, the better will I be able to contribute to the growth of others in that virtue". —How good it is to feel supported by each other.

**949** Don't come to me with "theories". It is our lives that have to convert those high ideals each day into ordinary, heroic, fruitful reality.

**950** We should indeed respect things that are old, and be grateful for them. Learn from them by all means, and bear in mind those past experiences, too. But let us not exaggerate; everything has its own time and place. Do we now dress in doublet and hose or wear powdered wigs on our heads?

**951** Don't get annoyed. Irresponsible behaviour often denotes poor formation or a lack of intelligence, rather than want of good spirit.

Teachers and directors should be expected to fill in those gaps with the responsible fulfilment of their duties.



—You should examine yourself... if you are in such a position.

**952** You run the great risk of being satisfied with living, or thinking that you have to live, “like a good boy”, who stays in a cosy and neat house, with no problems, and knowing only happiness.

That is a caricature of the home in Nazareth. Because Christ brought happiness and order, he went out to spread those treasures among men and women of all times.

**953** I think it is very natural for you to want the whole world to know Christ. But start with the responsibility of saving the souls of those who live with you and sanctifying each one of your fellow workers or fellow students. That is the principal mission that the Lord has entrusted to you.

**954** You should behave as if it all depended on you: whether the atmosphere in your place of work is to be one of hard work, cheerfulness, presence of God and



supernatural outlook.

—Why are you so apathetic? If you come across a group at work who are a bit difficult, you lose interest in them. Perhaps they have become difficult because you have neglected them. Yet you throw in the towel and think of them as a dead weight which holds back your apostolic ideals because they do not understand you...

—You may love and serve them with your prayer and mortification, but how do you expect them to listen to you if you never speak to them...?

—You will have many surprises the day you decide to talk to them one by one. What is more, if you do not change, they will one day be able to point a finger at you and say quite rightly: *Hominem non habeo* — I have no one to help me!

**955** Understand that holy things, when they are looked at and done every day in a holy manner, do not become “everyday” things. Everything Jesus Christ did on this earth was human — and divine!

**956** You say you cannot be happy to live

like everyone else, with the faith of the crowd. –Indeed, you have to have a personal faith joined to a sense of personal responsibility.

**957** The Most Holy Trinity grants you grace and expects you to make use of it responsibly. Given such an endowment, there is no place for your adopting easy, slow, lazy attitudes... because, apart from everything else, souls await you.

**958** You have a big problem; but if such things are approached properly, that is to say, with calm and responsible supernatural vision, the solution is always to be found.

**959** When they take their little children in their arms, mothers –good mothers– make sure they do not have any pins in their clothes which could hurt them. When we deal with souls, we should have the same gentleness, together with all the determination required.

**960** *Custos, quid de nocte?* – Watchman, how goes the night?

May you acquire the habit of having a day on guard once a week, during which to increase your self-giving and loving vigilance over details, and to pray and mortify yourself a little more.

Realise that the Holy Church is like a great army in battle array. And you, within that army, are defending one "front" on which there are attacks, engagements with the enemy and counter-attacks. Do you see what I mean?

This readiness to grow closer to God will lead you to turn your days, one after the other, into days on guard.

**961** As the reverse side of a "lost" vocation, or of a negative response to one of those constant calls of grace, we have to see God's will allowing it to happen. —True, but if we are sincere, we know well enough that this does not mean the excuse or mitigation of whatever happened. Because, looking at the obverse side, we can see a personal failure to fulfil the divine Will, which has sought us for himself and found no response.

**962** If you really love your own country, and I am sure you do, you would not hesitate to enlist as a volunteer to defend it from imminent danger. As I wrote to you before, everyone can be useful in an emergency: men and women; the old, the middle-aged, the young and even adolescents. Only invalids and children are left out.

Every day there is a call, not just for volunteers to enlist – that is very little – but for a general mobilisation of souls to defend Christ's Kingdom. And the King himself, Jesus, has called you expressly by your name. He asks you to fight in God's battles, and to put at his service the noblest powers of your soul: your heart, your will, your understanding, all your being.

–Listen to me: the flesh, with your clean life and especially with the protection of the Virgin Mary, is no problem. Are you going to be such a coward as to try to get out of being enlisted with the excuse that your heart or will or intellect are weak? Are you going to pretend to claim some grounds for remaining in the ancillary services?

—The Lord wants to make you an instrument for the front line —you are one already— and if you turn your back you deserve only pity, *as a traitor*.

**963** If time were mere gold... you could perhaps afford to squander it.

—But time is life, and you don't know how much you have left.

**964** The Lord converted Peter, who had denied him three times, without even a reproach, with a look full of Love.

—Jesus looks at us with those same eyes, after we have fallen. May we also be able to say to him, as Peter did: “Lord, you know all things, you know that I love you”, and amend our lives.

**965** They argue that they act gently and with understanding, in the name of charity, towards the oppressors.

—I pray to God that this gentleness and understanding of theirs may not be a camouflage for human respect and for seeking their own comfort, while they allow evil to be committed. For if that were

so, this gentleness and understanding would merely be complicity in the offence against God.

**966** The conversion of a soul cannot be made easy at the risk of many others possibly falling away.

**967** If someone thought that wolves could be reared among sheep... imagine what chance his sheep would have.

**968** Mediocre men, mediocre in mind and in Christian spirit, surround themselves by foolish people when they are in power. They are falsely persuaded by their vanity that in this way they will never lose control.

Sensible men, however, surround themselves with learned people who live a clean life as well as possessing knowledge, and become, through their help, men who can really govern. They are not in this matter deceived by their humility, for in making others great they themselves are made great.

**969** There is no prudence in appointing untried men to important posts of direction just to see how it works out. —It would be like risking the common good on a lottery.

**970** You are in a position of authority and you go by what people say? You are a doddering old man! —First of all you should worry about what God will say; then, very much in the second place, and sometimes not at all, you may consider what others might think. “Whoever acknowledges me before men”, says the Lord, “I too will acknowledge him before my Father who is in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father who is in heaven.”

**971** If you occupy a position of responsibility you should remember as you do your job that personal achievement perishes with the person who made himself indispensable.

**972** A fundamental rule for good management is to give responsibility to others without this becoming for you a way



of seeking anonymity or comfort. I repeat, delegate responsibility and ask each person to give an account of how his job is going, so that you can "render an account" to God; and to souls, if necessary.

**973** When you are dealing with problems, try not to exaggerate justice to the point of forgetting charity.

**974** The strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link.

**975** Never say of anybody under you: he is no good.

—It is you who are no good, for you cannot find a place where he will be of use.

**976** Reject any ambition for honours. Think instead about your duties, how to do them well and the instruments you need to accomplish them. —In this way, you will not hanker for position, and if one comes you will see it just as it is: a burden to bear in the service of souls.

**977** In the hour of rejection at the Cross,



the Virgin Mary is there by her Son, willing to go through the same fate. —Let us lose our fear of behaving like responsible Christians when the environment in which we move is not easy. She will help us.

## PENANCE

**978** This is what Our Lord wants, for we need it if we are to follow him closely. There is no other way. This is the work of the Holy Spirit in each soul – in yours. Be docile and present no obstacles to God, until he makes your poor flesh like that of Jesus on the Cross.

**979** If the word love is often on your lips, without being backed by little sacrifices, it becomes tedious.

**980** From every point of view, mortification has an extraordinary importance.

—Considering it humanly, anyone who does not know how to control himself will never be able to have a positive

influence on others. He will be overwhelmed by his surroundings as soon as he finds they appeal to his personal tastes. He will be a man without energy, incapable of any great effort when required.

—Considering it before God, do you not think it appropriate for us to show, with these small acts, how much we love, obey and respect the One who gave everything for us?

**981** A spirit of mortification, rather than being just an outward show of Love, arises as one of its consequences. If you fail in one of these little proofs, acknowledge that your love for the Love is wavering.

**982** Have you not noticed that mortified souls, because of their simplicity, have a greater enjoyment of good things, even in this world?

**983** Without mortification there is no happiness on earth.

**984** When you make up your mind to be more mortified, your interior life will

improve and you will be much more fruitful.

**985** Let us not forget that in all human activities there must be men and women who, in their lives and work, raise Christ's Cross aloft for all to see, as an act of reparation. It is a symbol of peace and of joy, a symbol of the Redemption and of the unity of the human race. It is a symbol of the love that the Most Holy Trinity, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit had, and continues to have, for mankind.

**986** "You won't laugh, Father, will you, if I tell you that, a few days ago, I found myself spontaneously offering the Lord the sacrifice of time it meant for me to mend a broken toy for one of my little children?"

—I am not laughing. I am delighted because with that Love, God sets about mending our faults.

**987** Be mortified, but not careless or bitter. —Be recollected, but not timid.

**988** A day without mortification is a day lost, because if we have not denied ourselves, we have not lived the holocaust.

**989** Haven't you gone against your own preference, your whims, some time, in something? —You must realise that the One who asks you is nailed to a Cross, suffering in all his senses and faculties, with a crown of thorns on his head... for you.

**990** You present yourself as a wonderful theoretician. But you don't give way to others even in the most insignificant trifles. I do not believe in that spirit of mortification of yours!

**991** Care in little things requires constant mortification. It is a way to make life more agreeable for others.

**992** I prefer virtue to austerity, Yahweh said, using different words, to the chosen people, who set too much store by certain external formalities.

—That is why we must cultivate penance and mortification as a proof of our

true love for God and for our neighbour.

**993** In our meditation, the Passion of Christ comes out of its cold historical frame and stops being a pious consideration, presenting itself before our eyes, as terrible, brutal, savage, bloody... yet full of Love.

—And we feel that sin cannot be regarded as just a trivial error: to sin is to crucify the Son of God, to tear his hands and feet with hammer blows, and to make his heart break.

**994** If you really want to be a penitent soul — both penitent and cheerful — you must above all stick to your daily periods of prayer, which should be intimate, generous and not cut short. And you must make sure that those minutes of prayer are not done only when you feel the need, but at fixed times, whenever it is possible. Don't neglect these details.

If you subject yourself totally to this daily worship of God, I can assure you that you will always be happy.

**995** A Christian always triumphs from the Cross, through his self-renunciation, because he allows God's omnipotence to act.

**996** When you look back on your life, which seems to have been marked by no great efforts or achievements, think how much time you have wasted, and how you can recover it with penance and greater self-giving.

**997** When you think of all the things in your life which remain worthless for not having been offered to God, you should act like a miser, anxious to get hold of every opportunity you can and to make use of each and every suffering. —For if suffering is always there for us poor creatures, what can it be but stupidity to waste it?

**998** Do you entertain a spirit of opposition, of contradiction? Very well, exercise it by opposing and contradicting yourself.

**999** While the Holy Family was asleep, the angel appeared to Joseph so that they

flee to Egypt. Mary and Joseph took the Child and started out on the journey without delay. They did not rebel, they did not find excuses, they did not wait till the following morning... Tell our Holy Mother Mary and our Father and Lord Saint Joseph that we wish to be prompt in loving all passive penance.

**1000** I write this number so that you and I can finish this book with a smile, and so that those blessed readers who out of simplicity or malice sought a cabalistic significance in the 999 points of *The Way* may rest easy.



## FURROW

– like **THE WAY**, a book which has sold over five million copies in fifty-two languages – is the fruit of St Josemaría's interior life and of his experience with souls.

The founder of Opus Dei wrote it to encourage personal prayer and help make it easier.

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